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Bengal on edge as cyclone 'Remal' approaches

KOLKATA, 26 MAY

Cyclone 'Remal' has strengthened into a severe cyclonic storm and is expected to hit the coasts of Bangladesh and West Bengal by Sunday midnight, with winds of 110-120 kmph and gusting up to 135 kmph, according to the Meteorological Department.

The cyclone is anticipated to bring extremely heavy rainfall to the coastal districts of West Bengal and heavy to very heavy rain in Kolkata and nearby areas.

As a precautionary measure West Bengal government has evacuated over 1.1 lakh people from coastal regions, including the Sundarbans and Sagar Island, to secure shelters, a senior official said on Sunday.

Remal, moving northward, is likely to intensify further before crossing the coasts between Sagar Island (West Bengal) and Khepupara (Bangladesh), near the southwest of Mongla port, around midnight on Sunday, the weather office reported.

In response to the approaching cyclone, the Eastern and South Eastern Railways have cancelled several train services in the coastal districts of South and North 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur district as a precaution.

Kolkata Airport authorities have decided to suspend flight operations for 21 hours from noon on Sunday due to the anticipated impact of cyclone Remal.

People move their belongings away from the seashore amid rain in South 24 Parganas district on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

This will affect 394 flights, both domestic and international. Precautionary measures include lowering high mast lights, securing equipment, and mooring smaller aircraft.

Eastern and South Eastern railways canceled some trains on routes to and from the coastal South and North 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur districts as a precautionary measure, officials said.

Eastern Railway suspended train services in the Sealdah South section and Barasat-Hasnabad section of Sealdah division from 11pm on Sunday to 6am on Monday, cancelling several EMU local trains, an official said.

The Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata will also suspend cargo and container handling operations for 12 hours from Sunday evening in response to the cyclone forecast.

Under its impact, heavy rainfall of 7 to 11 cm has been predicted for Bhadrak, Balasore, Kendrapara and Mayurbhanj districts. Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has taken pre-emptive measures to prevent loss of life or property at sea, with remote operating stations at Haldia and Paradip alerting fishing vessels and merchant ships. ICG has also prepared ships and aircraft for search and rescue missions, with disaster relief teams on standby at Haldia, Fraserganj, Paradip, and Gopalpur. *—PTI*

7 newborns killed in Delhi hospital fire

It did not have NOC from fire dept, 2 held

A forensic expert collects samples from site of the fire at the New Born Baby Care Hospital in east Delhi on Sunday; Locals rescue newborn babies **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

A massive fire broke out at a private children's hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar, leaving seven newborns dead, officials said on Sunday.

Police arrested the owner of the hospital Dr Naveen Kichi, who had been on the run since the fire outbreak late on Saturday and a doctor. The Doctor was untrained.

The officials of the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said the blaze broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital at around 11.30 pm on Saturday and soon spread to two other adjacent buildings.

Sixteen fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze, Divisional Fire Officer Rajendra Atwal said.

The hospital was operating despite the expiry of its license. It also did not have qualified doctors and had no clearance (NOC) from the fire department, police said on Sunday.

The police said that there was no fire extinguisher installed in the hospital for any emergency in case of fire and besides there was no emergency exit in the hospital in case of any untoward incident.

Oxygen cylinders kept in the two-storey building exploded due to which the adjacent buildings were damaged, he said.

A resident, Mukesh Bansal claimed that an 'unauthorised' oxygen refilling cylinder work was being carried out in the building.

Another fire official said two boutiques, a portion of IndusInd Bank operating from an adjacent building and a shop on the ground floor were also damaged besides an ambulance and a scooty parked outside the building.

Five babies are undergoing treatment at another hospital, he said, adding some of them have received minor burn injuries. According to eyewitnesses, locals and members of an NGO, Shaheed Seva Dal, were the first to rush to help.

Some residents climbed the building from the back side and rescued some of the newborns. Officials said the biggest challenge during such operations is controlling the public. *—PTI*

KKR crush SRH by 8 wickets to win third IPL title

CHENNAI, 26 MAY

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) lifted their third trophy in Indian Premier League (IPL) with a crushing eight-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in a completely one-sided final here on Sunday. Having lost the toss, KKR produced a clinical effort with the ball to dismiss SRH for 113, the lowest ever total in an IPL title clash. KKR chased down the target of 114 with as many as 57 balls to spare. Venkatesh Iyer remained not out on 52 off 26 balls. Mitchell Starc (2/14), Andre Russell (3/19) and Harshit Rana (2/24) were the most successful bowlers for KKR, as SRH failed to turn up for the big game. *—PTI*

12 hurt after Qatar Airways plane hits turbulence

LONDON, 26 MAY

Twelve people were injured when a Qatar Airways plane flying from Doha to Dublin on Sunday hit turbulence, airport authorities said. Dublin Airport said in a statement that flight QR017, a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, landed safely as scheduled before 1 pm. It said that upon landing the aircraft was met by emergency services, including airport police and the fire and rescue department, "due to six passengers and six crew... reporting injuries after the aircraft experienced turbulence while airborne over Turkey." The incident comes five days after a British man died of a heart attack and dozens of people were injured when a Singapore Airlines flight from London hit severe turbulence. *—AP*

33 DEAD

HC calls Rajkot fire a man-made disaster

AHMEDABAD, 26 MAY

A special bench of the Gujarat High Court on Sunday took suo motu cognizance of the fire incident at a game zone in Rajkot which left 33 people dead and said it was prima facie a "man-made disaster".

Such gaming zones and recreational facilities have come up without the necessary approvals from competent authorities, the bench of Justices Biren Vaishnav and Devan Desai observed.

The bench directed advocates of the Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot municipal corporations to appear before it on Monday with instructions as to under what provisions of law the authorities led these units to be set up or continue to operate under their jurisdiction.

Four children under the age of 12 were among the 33 killed and three others injured in the massive fire that swept through the game zone in Rajkot teeming with people enjoying a summer vacation outing on Saturday evening, as per the officials.

Police have registered an FIR against six partners of a game zone in Gujarat's Rajkot city on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and arrested two people. HC also wanted to know from the state government and the municipal corporations "whether such licenses, including the licenses to its use and compliance of fire safety regulations" were given to these respective (entertainment) zones that are in territorial jurisdiction of these corporations.

PHOTO: SCREENGARB

These entertainment zones, as newspapers suggest, have come up without the necessary approvals from the competent authorities, the court noted.

Quoting newspaper reports, the high court said temporary structures were created at the TRP game zone in Rajkot in order to overcome the hurdles caused in taking necessary permissions, no-objection certificates, including the fire NOC and construction permission. "Prima facie, a man-made disaster has occurred where innocent lives of children have been lost" and families have grieved their loss, it said.

A stock of highly inflammable materials such as petrol, fibres and fibre glass sheets were stored at the Rajkot game zone where the fire occurred, the court noted. *—PTI*

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Swati Maliwal **PHOTO: PTI**

MALIWAL BLAMES DHRUV RATHEE FOR DEATH THREATS

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

AAP MP Swati Maliwal alleged that she has been constantly receiving death threats amid the ongoing feud with her party. She also alleged that YouTuber Dhruv Rathee posted a 'one-sided video against her'.

Taking to X, Maliwal said, "After the leaders and volunteers of my party i.e. AAP orchestrated a campaign of character assassination, victim shaming and fanning of emotions against me, I have been getting rape and death threats." Maliwal previously alleged that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Bibhav Kumar assaulted her. She also uploaded some of the screenshots of abusive messages that she has received on Instagram. She alleged that AAP leadership is trying to intimidate her into withdrawing her complaint against Kejriwal's close aide Kumar. She also said, "I tried my best to reach out to Dhruv and to tell him my version but he ignored my calls and messages." "It is shameful that people like him, who claim to be independent journalists could act like AAP spokespersons," she said.

—Salar News with Agency

Sirens in Tel Aviv as Hamas fires rockets

DEIR AL-BALAH, 26 MAY

Rocket sirens sounded across central Israel, including in Tel Aviv, for the first time in months on Sunday, as Hamas claimed to have fired a barrage of rockets from Gaza.

The militants have continued to fire projectiles at communities around Gaza more than seven months into the war but have not fired longer-range rockets in months. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage from the latest barrage.

Earlier on Sunday, aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month. But was unclear if humanitarian groups would be able to access the aid because of on-going fighting in the area.

Egypt refuses to reopen its side of the Rafah crossing until control of the Gaza side is handed back to Palestinians. It agreed to temporarily divert traffic through Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing.

But that crossing has been largely inaccessible because of fighting linked to Israel's offensive in the nearby city of Rafah.

Israel says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter, but United Nations agencies say it is usually too dangerous to retrieve the aid on the other side. *—AP*

>>>More on Page 6

BBMP'S UDDER FAILURE

Cows forage for food in a garbage pile in Bengaluru. BBMP regularly fails to clean garbage in the City. Eating plastic can block the digestive system in cows and even cause death. The plastic also contains harmful chemicals that can leach into the milk **PHOTO: SALAR**

B'luru man files case against PM for 'hate' speech

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

A private complaint has been lodged against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the People's Representatives Special (Magistrate) Court, accusing him of delivering a provocative and hateful election speech in Banswara, Rajasthan on 21 April.

The complaint asserts that Modi claimed, "If Congress comes to power, it will redistribute the wealth of the people of the country to Muslims." The petitioner has requested that the Amrithalli police station be directed to register a criminal case against the Prime Minister. The court has scheduled a hearing tomorrow, with Advocate Murtaza Ali Baig representing the plaintiff. Engineer and human rights activist Ziaur Rahman Nomani of Hebbal filed the complaint on 23 May in the 42nd Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Court. Nomani contends that Modi's speech was insulting to Muslims, suggesting that it compared them to infiltrators who plundered the nation's wealth. He argued that this kind of rhetoric spreads hatred and disturbs public peace, calling for legal action against Modi.

—Salar News

DONATION ALLOWED

FSSAI cracks down on sale of human milk

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued a warning on Friday against the sale of human milk and its products, emphasising that commercialisation of breast milk are strictly prohibited in the country.

The advisory, titled "Advisory on Unauthorised Commercialization of Human Milk and its Products," was issued on 24 May in response to concerns raised by various registered societies. The FSSAI clarified that the processing and selling of human milk is not permitted under the FSS Act, 2006, and its associated regulations.

"All activities related to the commercialisation of human milk and its products must be immediately stopped," the FSSAI stated. The advisory warns of legal action against any food business operators (FBOs) found violating this directive. The FSSAI has also directed licensing authorities to withhold approval for any establishments involved in the sale of human milk.

According to national guidelines, Donor Human Milk (DHM) is strictly for non-commercial purposes. It can only be provided to newborns and infants admitted to healthcare facilities with dedicated Comprehensive Lactation Management Centres (CLMCs). The donation of breast milk should be a voluntary act, with no monetary compensation offered to the donor. Donated milk is meant to be freely distributed to feed infants whose mothers are unable to breastfeed themselves. regulations say. *—Salar News*

It also directed authorities to withhold approval for any establishments involved in the sale of human milk **PHOTO: PTI**

- FSSAI issued a warning on Friday against the sale of human milk and its products, emphasising that commercialisation of breast milk are strictly prohibited

Woman enters Bandipur, gets eaten by tiger

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

A 48-year-old woman was killed by a 10-year-old tiger while grazing her goats near Moorband hill in the HD Kote taluk of Mysuru on Saturday. The incident occurred inside the core area of Bandipur Tiger Reserve.

The victim Chikki is the resident of Malda village. The tiger had dragged away the victim after attacking her. Her companion, who was also grazing sheep nearby, rushed to the village and informed the forest officials. A search was initiated that continued till night but was called off due to lack of visibility. Chikki's body was discovered on the forest watch tower on Sunday. Meanwhile, Joseph Hoover, a former Forest Department board member and President of the United Conservation Movement, told Salar News, that senior forest officers must make sure localS don't venture deep into the forest to graze their livestock. *—Salar News*

Chikki **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: SALAR

Police arrest suspect in double murder

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

Banashankri police have arrested a man on Sunday over the murder of two people in a week. Upon interrogation, it was found that the same person did the two murders. Police said, the accused, Girish used to get drunk and throw rocks at the heads of the people who were sleeping on the road and murder them. According to the Banashankri police, the first murder took place on 12 May in Jayanagar 7th block when the victim was found dead with severe head injuries, indicating that someone had dragged and smashed them with a rock. A second similar murder happened on 18 May in the complex behind the City Market, where another person was killed by a rock smashed at their head. —*Salar News*

Mandya officials act against polluted water in Cauvery

MANDYA, 26 MAY

Mandya authorities grapple with reports of polluted water discharge from Mysuru city into Cauvery River. Mandya DC Kumar said, "We have received complaints regarding the discharge of polluted water from Mysuru Metropolitan Corporation jurisdiction to Cauvery River and adjacent canal. This would affect the drinking water supply in the nearest wards of Srirangapatnam. Following the complaints, we have conducted an on-site inspection and communicated our concerns to the Mysuru Corporation, urging them to cease the discharge immediately. Acknowledging the immediate need for action, Kumar disclosed, "We have allocated Rs 8.5 lakh to construct a temporary barrier as an interim measure. While this can help stem the flow temporarily, it may not suffice in the face of a significant volume of water. Therefore, the relocation of the existing intake well is imperative. "We must act decisively to safeguard our precious water resources. The welfare of our communities and the preservation of our environment depend on it. I have instructed for immediate assessments to be conducted, and once the situation is thoroughly evaluated, steps will be taken to halt the intake well operation." Kumar added.
—*Salar News*

Chitradurga woman dies after falling from train

CHITRADURGA, 26 MAY

A woman from Chitradurga—who was on a vacation with her family—died after allegedly falling from a moving train near Tonur, close to Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu . The deceased, Nirmalamma, 50, from Holalkere, Chitradurga, was travelling with her husband Kumar Achar and other relatives as part of a 50-person sightseeing group. The incident occurred on their return journey from Madurai.Achar woke up at the next station and was found his wife to be missing. He found her slippers and mobile phone in the toilet and lodged a complaint with the Dharmapuri police. It is suspected that she may have slipped and fallen out of the train while going to the toilet. —*Salar News*

Lightning strike claims 2 lives in Chittapur taluk

KALABURAGI, 24 MAY

A tragic incident occurred near Ladlapur village in Chittapur taluk, where two men lost their lives due to a lightning strike. The victims, identified as Eknath Waghmude (55) and Satish Shalake (40), were residents of Railway Colony in Wadi town. They were struck by lightning while taking shelter under a tree during a rainstorm. The unfortunate incident has been officially recorded. —*Salar News*

No response from Centre on Prajwal's passport: HM

Where is response for CM's first letter, asks Parameshwara

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Sunday said the State has not yet got any official response from the Centre regarding its request seeking cancellation of the diplomatic passport of Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing women.

Taking a dig at External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's reported statement that the State government's request to cancel the diplomatic passport of Prajwal was received only on 21 May, he sought to know what happened to the letter sent by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1 May.

G Parameshwara and Prajwal Revanna **PHOTO: PTI**

"Where is the (response for) first (CM's) letter? When a Chief Minister writes a letter to the Prime Minister's Office, it has to get its due respect. That did not happen. The External Affairs Minister is saying that they got the letter from the state on 21 May, so we have to ask where did the first letter go? They are taking action, it is good, let them take, but him saying that we (state) have sent a letter now and not earlier, is not right," he added.

However, the Ministry of External Affairs has served a show-cause notice to Prajwal asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by the Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him, people familiar with the matter said on Friday.

Chief Minister Siddarmaiah had written a second letter to the Prime Minister urging him to take "prompt and necessary" action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Hassan MP on 22 May.

—*PTI*

Deceased include 2 women, 3 men and a child **PHOTO: PTI**

6 including child killed in Hassan road accident

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

Six people including a child were killed in a road accident near here this morning, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred when the car in which they were travelling, allegedly collided with a truck on National Highway 75. The deceased include two women, three men and a child, police sources said. All of them other than the driver, were said to be from the same family hailing from Chikkaballapura, they said, adding they were reportedly returning from Mangaluru.

The bodies have been shifted to hospital for further procedures. Police have registered a case and further investigations are on, they said.

—*PTI*

AWARENESS RALLY

At least 300 delegates attend PODOCON 2024, a diabetic foot awareness walkathon organised by Foot Secure (phygital podiatry platform) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc) on Sunday. The 3K walk aims to raise awareness about podiatric care for diabetes management **PHOTO: SALAR**

Raghupati voices discontent with BJP, says didn't get notice

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

Former MLA Raghupathi Bhatt has raised questions about the BJP Disciplinary Committee's process, stating he has not yet received official notice of his expulsion.

Speaking to reporters in Udupi on Sunday, Bhatt expressed confusion and frustration, asking, "From which post was I dismissed, and why was this made public through the media instead of informing me directly?"

Bhatt clarified that he does not blame Prime Minister Narendra Modi or State leaders for his expulsion, but he is dissatisfied with BJP's internal system. He pointed to former chief minister Jagdish Shettar as an example of someone who criticised party leaders, left the party, and later returned to contest in Lok Sabha polls.

Raghupathi **PHOTO: PTI**

He also said that BJP workers cannot be permanently dismissed.

Bhatt also questioned committee's consistency in enforcing discipline.

He highlighted the lack of action against party members who cross-voted in Rajya Sabha elections and those who supported Congress in Lok Sabha elections.

Lingaraja Patil, President of State BJP Disciplinary Committee, announced Bhatt's expulsion on Saturday, citing his decision to contest against the party's official candidate from the South West Graduate constituency as a rebel candidate in the upcoming Legislative Council elections. —*Salar News*

Kolar school makes Rs5.2L by selling mangoes

AVALAKUPPA, 26 MAY

A lower primary school in State generated Rs 5.21 lakh by auctioning mango crops grown on the school's land. The school is situated in Avalakuppa, a border taluk of Srinivasapur taluk.

The 10 acre land for the mango grove was donated to the school in 1965 by Chikkasiddappa. The donation came with a condition that the funds generated by selling the crops must be used for the betterment of the school children.

The school authorities auction the mango crop every year. One-third of the auctioned amount goes to the school fund, while the remaining amount is given to the person who takes care of the trees and guards the crops.

This year, around eleven bidders participated in the auction, and Ram Charan won the rights over the mango crop with his highest bid of Rs 5.21 lakh.

The school authorities will use the funds generated from the auction to provide uniforms, shoes, and other essentials to the school children. They will also take the students on an excursion.

As of today, there are around four lakh rupees left in the bank account, which is jointly held by the SDMC President and the Head Master of the school.

—*Salar News*

One-third of the auctioned amount goes to school fund **PHOTO: SALAR**

The police seized the car, sword & dagger from suspects **PHOTO: X**

All 6 arrested in Udupi 'Garuda' gang fight

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

The Udupi police have arrested four more individuals from the 'Garuda' gang in connection with a gang war at Kunjibettu in Udupi. The accused identified as Ashik, Rakib, San, and Sharif rammed their cars into the road with men holding daggers. The incident happened on 18 May, and Udupi police arrested two from the gang war and seized the car, two motorcycles, a sword, and a dagger from the accused on Saturday. The Udupi town police arrested Ashiq and Raqib on 18 May for their involvement in this gang war. The incident went viral on social media. The footage showed two Maruti Swift cars, one white and one black, colliding in the middle of the road. The white car was seen reversing and hitting a person, while someone from the inside was using a dagger to attack another individual.

The police seized the car, two motorcycles, a sword, and a dagger from the suspects. The incident involved six individuals and police have arrested all six. The video circulating on social media has sparked public outrage and raised questions about the government's handling of law and order.

In response to the incident, the Karnataka BJP had criticised the State government, claiming that the law-and-order situation has deteriorated.

—*Salar News*

2 tuskers found dead in separate incidents in State

18-yr-old elephant was electrocuted near Coorg **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

An 18-year-old elephant was electrocuted in a coffee plantation near Tandur, Suntikoppa near Coorg. The incident occurred on the estate belonging to MM Girish. Forest officials suspect Girish of illegally tapping electricity from an overhead line, which likely caused the elephant's death.

In a separate incident, the decomposed carcass of a 40-year-old tusker was found on forest land in Bhagamandala, Talacauvery. Forest officials believe the elephant died a week ago from a fight with other elephants.

These deaths raise concerns about the ongoing issue of elephant electrocution in Karnataka. Joseph Hoover, a former Forest Department Board Member, said, "While farmers have the right to protect their crops, illegal electric fencing is a serious crime that can be deadly."

- In a separate incident, the decomposed carcass of a 40-year-old tusker was found on forest land in Bhagamandala, Talacauvery. Forest officials believe the ele-

This is not the first elephant death caused by electrocution this month. On 11 May, a 40-year-old elephant was electrocuted in a coffee estate in Chikkamagaluru district. Another elephant, aged 13-15, was also electrocuted near Haruvanahalli village in Chikkamagaluru.

—*Salar News*

ALERT STAFF SAVES THE DAY

Train accident averted on Konkan route

UDUPI, 26 MAY

A potential disaster was avoided on the Konkan Railway route near Udupi, thanks to the vigilance of track maintainer Pradeep Shetty.

In the early hours of Sunday, at 2.25 am, Shetty discovered a track weld failure between Innanje and Padubidri. He promptly reported the defect to the concerned officials, preventing a possible train mishap.

The defect on the track was swiftly fixed, and by 5.58 am, a track-fit certificate was issued with a speed restriction of 20 kmph for trains running on it.

Santosh Kumar Jha, Chairman and Managing Director of Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), recognised Shetty's quick action and announced an immediate cash award of Rs 25,000. The award was presented to Shetty at the restored track site later in the afternoon.

Passenger Vishal Shenoy, who was aboard the Panchaganga Express bound for Karwar, recounted that the train was detained at Nandikur Station, approximately 9 km south of Padubidri. Simultaneously, the Netravati Express bound for Thiruvananthapuram Central was also held up at Innanje. Shenoy observed a Rail Maintenance Vehicle (RMV) heading towards Padubidri for track restoration work.

The defect on the track was swiftly fixed and a track-fit certificate was issued with a speed restriction **PHOTO: PTI**

Train Number 16345, the Mumbai LTT-Thiruvananthapuram Central Netravati Express, was scheduled to depart from Udupi at 3 am, while Train Number 16595, the KSR Bengaluru-Karwar Panchaganga Express, was due to pass through the affected stretch around 4 am on Sunday.

- The defect on the track was swiftly fixed, and by 5.58 am, a track-fit certificate was issued with a speed restriction of 20 kmph for trains running on it. However, the cause of the track defect has not yet been disclosed by Konkan Railway officials

Both trains remained stationary until the track defect was rectified.

Sudha Krishnamurthy, Manager of Public Relations at Konkan Railway, confirmed that train traffic resumed after the track received a certification for safe operation, albeit with the speed restriction in place.

However, the cause of the track defect has not yet been disclosed by Konkan Railway officials. —*PTI*

Ward boy booked for punching patient in City

BENGALURU, 26 MAY

A complaint has been filed against a ward boy at KC General Hospital for assaulting a patient.

The patient's parents lodged the complaint at Malleswaram Police Station on Sunday.

Reportedly on Friday, Venkatesh, a resident of Nelamangala, was admitted to the ICU ward after consuming poison. The ward boy allegedly punched Venkatesh in in the face for shouting during treatment.

The incident was reported to the doctor, and when the relatives of the patient requested the hospital to check the CCTV footage, they were informed that it was not functioning.

Speaking to reporters, KC General Hospital Medical Superintendent Indira Kabade, claimed that that Venkatesh and the ward boy got into an argument. Hospital staff intervened and asked them to not to disturb other patients.

However, the ward boy continued arguing and was asked to leave.

PHOTO: PTI

- The ward boy allegedly punched Venkatesh in in the face for shouting during treatment

"Meanwhile, Venkatesh demanded the removal of his drips and attempted to get out of bed. He was stopped by the staff," she said, adding, "The treating doctor has confirmed that Venkatesh's condition is improving, and he is expected to be discharged from the hospital within three days."

—*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

SC to hear BJP's plea on ads during polls on Monday

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea filed by BJP challenging a Calcutta High Court order that had refused to interfere with a single-judge verdict restraining the party from issuing advertisements that are allegedly "violative" of the Model Code of Conduct during the Lok Sabha polls. According to the cause list of 27 May uploaded on the apex court website, a vacation bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and KV Viswanathan is scheduled to hear the plea. On 22 May, a division bench of the high court had said it was not inclined to entertain the appeal against the interim order passed by the single-judge bench. The court had also restrained BJP from publishing the advertisements mentioned by the TMC, in its petition claiming unverified allegations against it and its workers. *—PTI*

Saran's SP shifted days after poll violence left 1 dead

PATNA, 26 MAY

Saran's Superintendent of Police Gaurav Mangla was transferred on Sunday by Bihar government, following the post-poll violence in the district that left one dead. According to a notification issued by the state Home department, Mangala was transferred to the police headquarters in Patna with immediate effect. "Following the decision of the Election Commission of India, Kumar Ashish (SP-Rail), Muzaffarpur, will take the charge of SP, Saran with immediate effect," it said. One was killed and two others were injured in post-poll violence in the district's Bada Telpa area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk on Tuesday. Four FIRs were registered to probe the alleged irregularities on the day of polling, and also the violence thereafter. *—PTI*

Will ensure Modi doesn't become PM again: Owaisi

NASRIGANJ, 25 MAY

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Saturday charged Prime Minister Narendra Modi with heaping "insults" on Muslims by claiming that "mangalsutras" of women and quotas for deprived castes will be taken away by the INDIA bloc and given to the community. Addressing an election rally in the Karakat Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, Owaisi, whose party is not a part of the opposition coalition, vowed to ensure that Modi did not get a third consecutive term in office, which would lead to "scaremongering in the name of Hindus and Muslims, temples and mosques". "Modi spoke a lie when he said Muslim women beget more children. He has also been insulting the community again and again by saying Muslims want to lay their hands on 'mangalsutras'. *—PTI*

BJP unleashing violence, TMC worker killed: Didi

HAROA/RAJARHAT, 25 MAY

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday accused the opposition BJP of unleashing a reign of terror in Purba Medinipur district, the stronghold of her principal adversary Suvendu Adhikari, and killing a TMC worker. The TMC supremo made the allegations while addressing an election rally in Haroa under the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, on the day of the sixth-phase election. "Even yesterday, BJP killed an active member of our party at Mahisadal in Purba Medinipur district. Sensing defeat in the polls, they are resorting to killing and attacking people and TMC workers. But we will resist their bid," Banerjee said. A number of houses and shops had been set ablaze at Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district. *—PTI*

BJP will oppose Muslim quota, back UCC: Shah

Amit Shah accuses Opposition of misleading people on issue of Muslim reservation

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has slammed the INDIA bloc's criticism of the Election Commission as a ploy to cover up for its impending loss in Lok Sabha polls, asserting that BJP will score a bigger win in Opposition-ruled states due to a "positive mandate" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In an interview with PTI, Shah claimed that his party has not resorted to any religion-based campaign but insisted that if canvassing against reservation for Muslims, and reaching out to voters on the abolition of Article 370 and implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is religion-based campaign, then BJP has done it and will continue doing so.

He dismissed the Opposition's criticism of the Election Commission for its handling of poll data and the issue of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), saying that similar protocols and practices have been followed in previous assembly polls, including Telangana, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh where the BJP lost.

"If those elections were fair, then this election is also fair. When you see defeat, you start crying in advance and try to find excuses to go abroad. This can't go on and on. They want to go on vacation on 6 June. So, they are telling something or the other," he said.

> **If those elections were fair, then this election is also fair. When you see defeat, you start crying in advance and try to find excuses to go abroad. This can't go on and on. They want to go on vacation on 6 June. So, they are telling something or the other**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Congress's questions about the polling process is aimed at covering up Rahul Gandhi's failure, he said. Shah said Opposition had not offered any such suggestion at the customary all-party meeting called by the poll watchdog before the elections. "Whenever the opposition loses an election, they raise some questions. There is zero possibility of rigging in EVMs and they want an election which can be rigged."

Asked if the party was overly dependent on Modi and if a relatively weak Opposition was benefitting from its alliance, he said it was not a negative but a positive vote which the ruling alliance is receiving.

He accused the main Opposition of misleading people on the issue of Muslim reservation, insisting that its accusation that the BJP has been telling a lie rings hollow as it has already implemented such a religious quota in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

"If they divide the truth in pieces to mislead people, then isn't it our duty to put these pieces together and inform people," he said. *—PTI*

PM waived loans of 22 but didn't give HP Rs 9K cr: RaGa

SHIMLA, 26 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi waived loans worth Rs 16 lakh-crore of 22 people in the last 10 years but could not give Rs 9,000 crore to deal with the disaster caused by monsoon rains in Himachal Pradesh last year, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday.

Rather than helping the hilly state, Modi made an attempt to "steal" the state's elected government, Gandhi said.

His statement came days after Modi alleged wrongful distribution of Central flood aids by the Congress in the state and promised action.

Addressing an election rally at Nahan in Himachal Pradesh's Sirmaur district in support of Congress candidate from Shimla (SC) Parliamentary constituency Vinod Sultanpuri, he said Modi handed over all storage facilities to one person to control the prices of apple. The share prices of Adani-owned companies rise whenever Narendra Modi is sworn in, Gandhi claimed.

Rahul Gandhi PHOTO: PTI

In his speech, Gandhi promised Minimum Support Price on crops and farm loan-waiver if his party comes to power in the Centre. He said poor families would get Rs 1 lakh every years till they are brought above poverty line. The former Congress president also promised to fill 30 lakh vacancies in government departments to provide jobs to the unemployed youths in the country.

He claimed BJP leaders attacking the Constitution by saying they would abolish it He appealed to Congress workers to make effort to ensure the victory of party candidates in all four Lok Sabha seats to thwart the attempts of the BJP leaders to "attack" the Constitution of India. "My sister lives here in Shimla and Rahul and Priyanka are your soldiers at Delhi," he asserted. He also said media has lost its credibility. *—PTI*

PM says INDIA will change Constitution for Muslim quotas

DEORIA, 26 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday claimed that "jihadis" across the border are supporting Samajwadi Party and Congress who are appealing for "vote jihad" in the country. Modi also claimed INDIA bloc parties will rewrite the Constitution to provide reservation on the basis of religion, and alleged they want to turn the country's majority community into second-class citizens.

Addressing an election rally here in support of BJP candidates in Bansgaon and Deoria Lok Sabha seats, he alleged that INDIA bloc does not want to take the country forward, but back by several decades. "Their agenda is not the development of India," Modi said.

Narendra Modi PHOTO: PTI

"In Pakistan, 'duas' (prayers) are being made for the INDI alliance of Samajwadi Party and Congress. Jihadis across the border are supporting them. The SP and the Congress are making an appeal for 'vote jihad' here," said the prime minister in an apparent reference to a remark by an INDIA bloc candidate.

He said, "INDIA group is saying that if they come to power, they will reimpose Article 370 in Kashmir. They will repeal the CAA (Citizenship (Amendment) Act) which gives citizenship again to the victims of Partition. Whose agenda is this... this is what these anti-India forces want?

Modi went on to allege, "Their agenda is not the development of India. They want to take back the country by several decades." Hitting out at the bloc, Modi claimed the "INDI jamaat" has been abusing him for his opposition to reservation on the basis of religion.

He said the "INDIA people want their arms deals to continue, their brokerage to continue, scams to continue." Modi added, "Today we are moving forward strongly towards a self-reliant India in the defence sector." *—PTI*

> **When self-confidence is lost, speech falters. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has realised his government is going. Modi can see the PM's post slipping away from him. The victory wave that started in western Uttar Pradesh has reached the seventh phase. Those who gave the '400-paar' slogan are going to be defeated. The country's 140 crore people will make the BJP yearn for even 140 seats**
>
> -Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief

> **Welfare schemes for the poor have been implemented with the motto of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi treats 140 crore Indians as his family and strives to bring prosperity in every citizen's life. Under Modi's leadership, people are witnessing the emergence of a new India which is going to become a superpower**
>
> -Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with former Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar, party candidate from Patna Sahib constituency Anshul Avijit and CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

Modi's 'mujra' remark an insult to Bihar, says Kharge

SASARAM, 26 MAY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'mujra' remark against opposition leaders and said that he "insulted Bihar" by making such a comment.

Addressing an election rally in favour of Manoj Kumar, Congress leader and Mahagathbandhan nominee for Sasaram Lok Sabha seat, Kharge said, "Modi ji insulted Bihar by using this word... it means mujra happens here. This is an insult to Bihar and its people. This is not how a PM should talk. He should be talking in a statesman-like manner."

Congress President's attack came after Modi vowed to thwart alleged attempts to rob Dalits and backward classes of reservation by INDIA bloc, which he accused of being "enslaved" and performing "mujra" for its Muslim vote bank.

"Bihar is the land that has given a new direction to the fight for social justice. I wish to declare from this soil that I will foil the plans of the INDIA bloc to rob the SCs, STs and OBC of their rights and divert those to Muslims. They may remain enslaved and perform 'mujra' to please their vote bank," Modi had said while addressing a poll rally in the state on Saturday.

Kharge further said, "Modi considers himself as a 'Tees Maar Khan' (a person who glorifies himself). He is under the wrong impression. It is the people who are real 'Tees Maar Khan'. He (Modi) is like a dictator. If he returns to power for a third term, people will not be allowed to speak freely."

After Modi's 'Mujra' remark on the INDIA bloc, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav also wrote a letter to PM, saying that the former has said many baseless, factless and false things to the people *—PTI/ANI*

NEVER HEARD OF WORK FROM JAIL: RAJNATH ON KEJRI

CHANDIGARH, 26 MAY

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday took a dig at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying he had heard about "work from home" but it is the first time that he is hearing of "work from jail".

Addressing an election rally in Khanna for the BJP's Fatehgarh Sahib Candidate Gejja Ram Valmiki, Singh said, "AAP is the ruling party. You don't need to be told much about what kind of work it is doing." "There is also an AAP government in Delhi. But the AAP leader was jailed in the liquor scam," Singh, said referring to Kejriwal's arrest in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam.

The defence minister said he thinks every leader should have the moral courage to resign from their post if they face any allegation until being cleared of the charges.

Supreme Court granted AAP supremo Kejriwal interim bail till 1 June, the last day of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections, and directed him to surrender and go back to jail on 2 June. He also attacked Kejriwal on floating AAP following the Anna Hazare-led movement against corruption. *—PTI*

Cong alleges Kerala Min 'lied' about liquor policy

Opposition questioned the silence of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on the issue PHOTO: PTI

KOCHI, 26 MAY

Congress on Sunday continued its attack against the Left government in Kerala over its liquor policy, accusing Excise Minister MB Rajesh and Tourism Minister PA Mohammed Riyas of "lying" to the public by claiming that no discussion had taken place regarding the scrapping of the "dry day" norm.

Opposition questioned the silence of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on the issue and asked why a vigilance probe had not been ordered into the allegations despite receiving a complaint.

Congress also called for the government to announce a judicial probe into the allegations and to sack the excise minister. The criticism came after reports that the state government was considering scrapping the 'dry day' norm (which prohibits the sale of alcohol in the state on the first day of every calendar month), sparking a political storm in the state.

The issue of withdrawal of the 'dry day' policy snowballed into a controversy after an audio clip purportedly of a bar association member allegedly asking other members to pay money for a 'favourable liquor policy', was aired on TV channels.

Opposition Congress-led UDF came out with allegations that the Left government sought Rs 20 crore from bar owners to make a policy favourable to them and demanded the resignation of Minister Rajesh.

Brushing aside the allegations and the opposition's demand, Rajesh said the state government has not yet held any deliberations regarding its liquor policy. *—PTI*

TO RETAIN PATIALA

'Maharani Sahiba' banks on people's 'bharosa, ashirwaad'

PATIALA, 26 MAY

Preneet Kaur is banking on what she calls people's unwavering "bharosa and ashirwaad" as she embarks on yet another electoral battle from the prestigious Patiala Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab, seeking a fifth term in Parliament.

Kaur, 79, the wife of former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh -- the scion of the erstwhile Patiala royal family -- is locked in a four-corner electoral battle in Patiala, widely considered to be a Congress bastion.

Having ended her long association with the Congress and joined the BJP, "Maharani Sahiba" -- as she is often called by her supporters -- holds the keys to the saffron party's fortunes in Punjab, where it is contesting the Lok Sabha elections independently.

BJP candidate from Patiala constituency Preneet Kaur during an election compaign for Lok Sabha polls, in Patiala PHOTO: PTI

Kaur was suspended by the Congress last year after Singh joined the BJP. She switched to the saffron party this March. The Patiala constituency is considered to be Kaur's stronghold. *—PTI*

INTENSE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Abhishek Banerjee faces crucial test in Diamond Harbour seat

DIAMOND HARBOUR, 26 MAY

The Diamond Harbour poll battleground encapsulates an intense dynamic in West Bengal's political landscape where the TMC, led by its de facto number two Abhishek Banerjee, touts the seat as a 'model constituency' while the Opposition paints it as a 'laboratory of violence'.

A victory with an enhanced margin compared to 2019 will surely bolster Banerjee's leadership credentials and consolidate his influence in the party at a time when sharp intra-party fractures have cost the TMC influential leaders like Tapas Roy and Arjun Singh ahead of the ensuing polls and ace organisers like Suvendu Adhikari three years ago, all to BJP. Nestled between Kolkata and the South 24 Parganas district, Diamond Harbour stands as a strategic stronghold for the Trinamool Congress. The stakes are high, with outcomes poised to influence both TMC's inner dynamics and West Bengal's politics at large in the days ahead. *—PTI*

TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee during a campaign road show for Lok Sabha polls at Pujali in South 24 Parganas PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

4 killed, 5 injured as bus rams into shanties in Goa

PANAJI, 26 MAY

Four labourers were killed and five others critically injured when a private bus rammed into two roadside shanties at an industrial estate in South Goa district, police said on Sunday. The accident took place at around 11.30pm on Saturday at the Verna Industrial Estate when the labourers, engaged in road construction work, were sleeping in the shanties, they said. Deputy Superintendent of Police Santosh Desai said the bus driver, identified as Bharat Govekar, resident of nearby Cartolim village, has been taken into custody and is being questioned. The driver's medical examination confirmed he was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, he said. "Three more people who were out (of shanties) on mobile phone calls were saved. *—PTI*

Clash at KSU camp prompts KPCC inquiry

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 26 MAY

A state-level leadership camp organised near here by the Kerala Students Union, the student outfit of Congress in Kerala, was allegedly marred by a clash among participants on Saturday night, prompting the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee to conduct an inquiry. Congress sources said Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) has constituted a three-member committee comprising its general secretaries to investigate the incident after visuals of the clash were telecast by the media on Sunday. Police said they have not received any complaints regarding the alleged clash that occurred at the camp organised at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Social Sciences in Neyyardam. *—PTI*

Fire engulfs pet shop in Kerala, kills 100 birds

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 26 MAY

Around 100 birds, rabbits and fish were killed as a fire engulfed a pet shop at Neeramankuzhy here early Sunday morning, police said. They said that some pets were saved after the fire brigade extinguished the blaze at the pet shop owned by a person named Shibin. The incident came to light when the family members of the building owner who live close to the shop experienced breathlessness due to the smoke and informed the fire force and the pet shop owner. Shibin said around 100 birds, some rabbits and a few fish died in the fire, and accessories for nurturing pets got destroyed. He suffered a loss of over Rs 2.5 lakh. *—PTI*

Assam: 3 trapped inside illegal rat-hole mine

DIBRUGARH, 26 MAY

At least three coal miners are trapped inside an illegal rat-hole mine of Patkai hills in Tinsukia district of Assam following a landslide, officials said on Sunday. According to information, the incident occurred around 12.30 am in the illegal Tikok West mining site between Bargolai and Namdang, located under the Tikok colliery in Ledo, a senior official of the district administration told PTI. In total, four coal workers were engaged in the work of procuring illegal coal from the rat-hole mine, the official said. "Three of them went inside the mine and the fourth one was assisting in coal transportation. Suddenly, a landslide occurred, which trapped the three workers inside the mine. The administration is carrying out a rescue operation at the moment and several agencies are being called in to assist. *—PTI*

2 held for Rajkot game zone fire that killed 33

6 partners booked; facility did not have NOC for fire safety

RAJKOT, 26 MAY

Debris being removed from the game zone site where a major fire on Saturday evening killed at least 33 people and injured three, in Rajkot, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Police have registered an FIR against six partners of a game zone in Gujarat's Rajkot city on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and arrested two persons after a fire there killed 33 people, officials said on Sunday.

The local police in November 2023 granted a booking license to the gaming zone, which was renewed for the period from 1 January to 31 December, Rajkot Police Commissioner Raju Bhargava said.

"The game zone had received permissions from the roads and buildings department. It had also submitted a proof of fire safety equipment to obtain the fire NOC which was under process and not yet completed," the official said.

The game zone had fire safety equipment but action taken to control the blaze was not sufficient, leading to the tragedy on Saturday, he said.

As per the FIR, the accused persons erected a 50-metre wide and 60-metre long structure with the height of around two-three storey building using metal sheet fabrication to create a game zone.

Yuvrajsinh Solanki, a partner in the Raceway Enterprise, which operated TRP game zone, and the entertainment facility's manager Nitin Jain have so far been arrested, Rajkot Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Parthrajsinh Gohil said.

The six people against whom the case was registered by Rajkot taluka police in the wee hours of Sunday are Dhaval Corporation proprietor Dhaval Thakkar, Raceway Enterprise partners Ashoksinh Jadeja, Kiritsinh Jadeja, Prakashchand Hiran, Yuvrajsinh Solanki and Rahul Rathod, as per the FIR.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the PM's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of each deceased , his office said on Sunday.

The injured persons would be given Rs 50,000, PM's Office said on X.

Gujarat government has also announced an ex gratia of Rs 4 lakh to kin of each deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured persons. *—PTI*

KIN MISSING

Locals protest near blast site in Chhattisgarh

PIRDA 26 MAY

A tense situation prevailed on Sunday near Pirda explosives manufacturing factory blast site in Chhattisgarh as villagers, particularly those who claimed their relatives were missing after the incident, staged a protest.

A large number of police personnel were deployed around the factory premises near Pirda village in Bemetara district and officials were trying to pacify the villagers.

One person was killed and at least six others were injured in the explosion at the Special Blasts Limited near Pirda village in Berla development block on Saturday, where rescuers had also found some body parts.

Government officials were yet to confirm about the number of missing workers following the incident and said everything will be clear when the huge pile of debris is removed from the blast site.

Some eyewitnesses had told local news channels that at least 100 persons were working in the explosives manufacturing factory when the blast took place. They claimed several persons were missing and feared trapped under the debris. The explosion at the factory had left a nearly 30-foot-deep crater, officials earlier said. The kin of the deceased will receive a financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh, while Rs 50,000 each will be given to the injured who will also be provided treatment by the government, it said.

Rajkumar Yadav, a resident of Borsi village adjacent to the factory, said his 20-year-old son, who worked in the unit, was missing after the blast. *—PTI*

Cong youth wing holds essay competition at Pune car crash site

PUNE, 26 MAY

Congress's youth wing in Pune organised an essay writing competition on Sunday at the spot of the car crash involving a 17-year-old in which two persons were killed in the city.

The competition was held at the accident site in the Kalyani Nagar area, where two IT professionals died after their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porche allegedly driven by a minor in the early hours of 19 May.

The police claim that the teenager was drunk at the time of the accident.

The teenager was initially granted bail by the Juvenile Justice Board, which also asked him to write an essay on road accidents, but following outrage over the lenient treatment and a review application by the police, he was sent to an observation home till 5 June.

Around 100 people, mostly youngsters, participated in the essay competition and were given the topics "My favourite car", "If my father was a builder", and "Ill effects of alcohol" to write on.

Congress MLA Ravindra Dhangekar of the Kasbha assembly constituency also participated in the competition.

Talking to reporters, Dhangekar said, "I condemn the incident in which two youngsters lost their lives. The police should take stringent action against pubs and restaurants that operate beyond permitted time to avert such accidents."

The police have arrested the teenager's father, realtor Vishal Agarwal, and his grandfather, Surendra Agarwal, in connection with the accident.

The teen's grandfather, Surendra Agarwal, was arrested for the 'illegal confinement' of the driver. *—PTI*

11 dead in UP as truck with gravel overturns on their bus

SHAHJAHANPUR, 26 MAY

At least 11 people were killed and 10 others suffered injuries *PHOTO: PTI*

Eleven pilgrims headed to Purnagiri temple in Uttarakhand were buried to death when a gravel-loaded dumper truck overturned on their bus and emptied its content into their vehicle, a senior official said Sunday.

Ten other pilgrims were seriously injured in the Saturday night incident and have been admitted to the Government Medical College here, the official said.

Shahjahanpur Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Meena told PTI the incident occurred at Hajiyapur village under the Khutar police station area when the privately-owned bus had halted at a roadside eatery on its way to the temple in Uttarakhand's Tanakpur.

While some of the devotees, all were from Sitapur district, had alighted for dinner others waited inside the bus.

Suddenly, the dumper truck carrying gravel lost control, overturned and fell onto their bus, unloading the content on the waiting pilgrims, he said.

According to Meena, Sudhanshu, 7, Aditya, 8, Ajit, 15, Rohini, 20, Pramod, 30, Seema, 30, Suman Devi, 36, Ramgopal, 48, Shiv Shankar, 48, Chutki, 50 died on the spot, while Sonavati, 45 succumbed during treatment. SP and District Magistrate Umesh Pratap Singh also reached the spot after they were informed about the incident. The driver of the dumper fled from the spot and the police are looking for him. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed condolences to the families of the deceased and directed the district administration to ensure the injured people are provided proper treatment. *—PTI*

Bhavesh Bhinde *PHOTO: PTI*

HOARDING CRASH: BHINDE'S CUSTODY EXTENDED TILL 29 MAY

MUMBAI, 26 MAY

A Mumbai court on Sunday extended till 29 May the police custody of Bhavesh Bhinde, director of the advertising firm which had installed a hoarding that collapsed in Ghatkopar area here and claimed 17 lives.

M/S Ego Media Pvt Ltd, the advertising firm of Bhinde, managed the giant hoarding that collapsed on a petrol pump during a dust storm and rains on 13 May.

As Bhinde absconded after the incident, police registered a case against him on the charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder under section 304 of the Indian Penal Code. He was arrested in Udaipur, Rajasthan, on 16 May and brought to the city.

Bhinde was subsequently remanded in police custody till 26 May.

On Sunday, the crime branch, which is probing the case, produced Bhinde before the metropolitan magistrate court at the end of his previous custody.

As per the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, it had not granted permission for the hoarding. *—PTI*

SEC 144 IMPOSED

Akola hottest city in Maharashtra at 45°C

AKOLA, 26 MAY

Akola has been the hottest city in Maharashtra over the last two days when it recorded the maximum temperature of more than 45 degrees Celsius, as per the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data.

In view of the heatwave conditions likely in Akola, Collector Ajit Kumbhar on Saturday imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) till 31 May, prohibiting public gathering.

The collector in an order asked establishments to made adequate arrangements of drinking water and fans for workers and to change the timings of private coaching classes, saying they should not be held during the afternoon.

Meanwhile, the severe heat wave in Rajasthan will continue for next two to three days, said India Meteorological Department on Sunday. Maximum temperature of 50 degrees celsius has reached for the first time in this summer season in Rajasthan. The 50 degrees celsius was recorded in Phalodi in the last 24 hours to the IMD data.

Mercury has been on the rise in many parts of the Vidarbha region since the past few days.

It will be the responsibility of the establishment's owner to prepare adequate sheds for protection from heat stroke, arrangement of fans, coolers or other devices, adequate drinking water and first aid boxes, the order said. *—PTI*

B'desh seeks Interpol help in MP's murder

DHAKA, 26 MAY

Anwarul Azim Anar *PHOTO: X/@munwarenj*

Bangladesh will seek help from Interpol to bring back the fugitive "mastermind" of the brutal killing of the ruling party lawmaker Anwarul Azim Anar, who was found murdered in Kolkata last week, a top official said here on Sunday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police's (DMP) Detective Branch (DB) chief Mohammad Harun-or-Rashid made the remarks while talking to reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Sunday just before leaving for Kolkata to investigate the murder case.

"We will seek help from Interpol to bring back Akhtaruzzaman Shaheen, the fugitive "mastermind" of Jhenaidah-4 MP Anwarul Azim Anar murder," said Harun.

The investigators claimed that an alleged rift over gold smuggling between Anar and his friend, who is a US citizen and his business partner, could be the cause of the crime. Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan earlier named a businessman as the key suspect in Anar's murder. *—PTI*

55 tigers among more than 5,000 animals spotted in Tadoba reserve

Nagpur, 26 May

A total of 5,069 wild animals, including 55 tigers, have been spotted in the latest `waterhole animal survey' at the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district, officials said. 'Nisarganubhav-2024' was organised on 23 and 24 May on the occasion of Buddha Purnima (when there is enough light at night due to a full moon), the TATR said in a release on Saturday. *—PTI*

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

LANCET STUDY

Bihar: Alcohol ban curbed 21L violence cases

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Ban has also prevented 18 lakh men from being obese *PHOTO: UNSPLASH*

Bihar's alcohol ban in 2016 prevented 24 lakh cases of daily and weekly consumption, and 21 lakh cases of intimate partner violence, according to new research published in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia journal.

The ban is also estimated to have prevented 18 lakh men in the state from becoming overweight or obese, it said.

A team of researchers, including those from The International Food Policy Research Institute, Poverty, Health and Nutrition Division, US, analysed data from national and district level health and household surveys.

In April 2016, the Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act brought about a near complete halt on the manufacture, transport, sale, and consumption of alcohol throughout the state.

They also found evidence for reduced physical violence against women in Bihar, "with a 4.6 percentage points decrease in emotional violence and a 3.6 percentage points decrease in sexual violence".

On the aspect of the ban's impact on men's health, the authors' modelling estimated that cases of underweight men increased by four percentage points, and those of overweight or obese men decreased by 5.6 percentage points, compared to trends in the neighbouring states.

The findings will be valuable for policy-makers contemplating similar bans in other Indian states, the researchers said. *—PTI*

Leh-bound SpiceJet suffers bird hit; returns to Delhi

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

A Leh-bound SpiceJet aircraft suffered a bird hit on Sunday morning and returned to the national capital, according to the airline.

The plane landed back safely and the passengers were deplaned normally.

A source said the Boeing 737 plane had around 135 people onboard.

In a statement, SpiceJet said the aircraft operating SG 123 from Delhi to Leh returned back to the national capital after suffering a bird hit on engine 2.

"The aircraft landed back safely in Delhi and passengers were deplaned normally," it said.

The airline also said the aircraft made a normal landing and not an emergency landing.

Earlier, the source said that a full emergency was declared at the airport and the aircraft, which took off at around 1030 hours, landed safely at about 11 am. The plane returned due to engine vibrations, the source added. *—PTI*

COLOURFUL CELEBRATIONS

A 'Tobas' dancer performs in the annual parade honoring the 'Lord of Great Power', in La Paz, Bolivia. Bolivians celebrate one of the country's biggest and most extravagant religious festivals which pays tribute to Jesus Christ in a fusion of Indigenous beliefs and Catholicism
PHOTO: AP

Hyd deadline looms as Andhra yet to have capital

Enacted on 1 March, 2014, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 mandated that Hyderabad shall be the common capital for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for 10 years
PHOTO: PTI

As Hyderabad is all set to cease to be the joint capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana on 2 June, the fate of a capital city and its geographical location for the residual Andhra Pradesh hangs in balance even 10 years after the bifurcation.

While matters such as apportioning of public assets worth up to Rs 1.4 lakh crore are still pending to be resolved, Andhra Pradesh's ruling YSRCP and principal Opposition TDP continue to toe their respective positions of a single and multiple capital cities.

Enacted on 1 March, 2014, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 mandated that Hyderabad shall be the common capital for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh 'for such period not exceeding 10 years', and accordingly, effective 2 June, 2024, Hyderabad will be the capital city only for Telangana.

Though the legislation envisages a new capital and makes the 10-year deadline clear, there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel for Andhra Pradesh, considering the conflicting stances and initiatives of the two dispensations in the past ten years.

When YSRCP chief and incumbent Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy captured power in 2019, dislodging the N Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP regime (2014-19), he shattered the Amaravati capital dreams of his predecessor by coming up with the proposal to have three capital cities.

Championing decentralisation and welfare-centric governance, Reddy projected Amaravati as the legislative capital, Kurnool as judicial capital and the port city of Visakhapatnam the executive capital, from where he would function.

During the months that preceded the 13 May simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, Reddy had promised multiple times that he would relocate to Visakhapatnam but failed to keep his word, and according to the YSRCP it was owing to legal tangles. Matters related to the three capital cities proposal are pending before the Supreme Court.

Amidst this scenario, IPS officer-turned-politician, VV Lakshminarayana said Andhra Pradesh should demand the Centre to continue with the ongoing arrangement of Hyderabad as joint capital till finalisation of the capital city. Lakshminarayana, a former CBI joint director, launched a new political party, Jai Bharat National Party last year. His party fought polls and he, a retired Additional Director General of Police, contested from Visakhapatnam North Assembly constituency.

"Only the announcement was made, foundation stone laid and some work had started on Amaravati but the full-fledged capital has not come up. But there is an opportunity, parties should be able to convince the President of India to extend Hyderabad as joint capital until a capital city comes up," Lakshminarayana told PTI.

When he was chief minister, Naidu rolled out grand plans to make Amaravati the capital of the state. However, they could not take off for several reasons. YSRCP Rajya Sabha member A Ayodhya Rami Reddy reiterated his party's stand of setting up three-capitals to ensure decentralisation and good governance.

Reaffirming TDP's commitment to Amaravati, TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh told PTI, "One state, one capital and it's Amaravati. Decentralised development. Every district must develop, and during the TDP's regime we proved it. Kia Motors to Anantapur, electronics manufacturing at Chittoor, etc,"

Lakshminarayana held the two state governments of the past 10 years, TDP and YSRCP, as well as the BJP-led Union government responsible for the absence of a capital city. The TDP both at the time of bifurcation and even now is part of the NDA, he noted.

"A lot of meetings were convened by the Union Home Ministry regarding the assurances given by the bifurcation Act but nothing concrete has happened. Now it is the responsibility of the Central government to do the needful. That is important," he said, reflecting on the related initiatives during the YSRCP government's five-year tenure.

The former CBI officer opined that bifurcation should not have been even taken up before the establishment of a capital city for Andhra Pradesh. Further, he underscored that the Telugu states are yet to apportion public assets worth up to Rs 1.4 lakh crore.

J Ravi Shankar, a Supreme Court lawyer who took up the legal cudgels for 'saving Amaravati' claimed that the centrally located place is the capital city of the southern state as per the Central government's map. "Amaravati is already there. Amaravati has been notified. Even the High Court has been notified by the President of India. And the Act says the Governor's office and other offices should be located at Amaravati, capital of Andhra Pradesh," said Shankar. He claimed that the concept of three capitals 'is a non-existent theory', and noted that wherever the chief minister sits, that is the executive capital of a state. Amid conflicting ideas, assertions and legal tangles, 4 June, the day of counting of votes, is seen by many as a harbinger of hope for Andhra Pradesh as the party forming the next government is expected to clear the decks for the much-awaited capital city.

—PTI

SALAR سالار

Viruses hiding in DNA linked to depression, schizophrenia

Around 8 per cent of human DNA is made up of genetic sequences acquired from ancient viruses. These sequences, known as human endogenous retroviruses (or Hervs), date back hundreds of thousands to millions of years – with some even predating the emergence of Homo sapiens.

Our latest research suggests that some ancient viral DNA sequences in the human genome play a role in susceptibility to psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder.

Hervs represent the remnants of these infections with ancient retroviruses.

Retroviruses are viruses that insert a copy of their genetic material into the DNA of the cells they infect. Retroviruses probably infected us on multiple occasions during our evolutionary past.

When these infections occurred in sperm or egg cells that generated offspring, the genetic material from these retroviruses was passed on to subsequent generations, becoming a permanent part of our lineage.

Initially, scientists considered Hervs to be "junk DNA" – parts of our genome with no discernible function. But as our understanding of the human genome has advanced, it's become evident that this so-called junk DNA is responsible for more functions than originally hypothesised.

First, researchers found that Hervs can regulate the expression of other human genes. A genetic feature is said to be "expressed" if its DNA segment is used to produce RNA (ribonucleic acid) molecules.

These RNA molecules can then serve as intermediaries leading to the production of specific proteins, or help to regulate other parts of the genome.

Initial research suggested that Hervs regulate the expression of neighbouring genes with important biological functions. One example of this is a Herv that regulates the expression of a gene involved in modifying connections between brain cells.

Hervs have also been found to produce RNAs and even proteins in blood and brain samples. These molecules have the potential to exert a wide range of functions, as they can travel across cellular compartments to execute different roles.

Scientists have also found evidence suggesting certain human genes are derived from Hervs. This indicates there were instances during evolution where Hervs were co-opted for specialised biological functions.

For example, the human genes syncytins 1 and 2, which are derived from Hervs, play pivotal roles in placental development.

HERVs in psychiatric disorders

Considering the abundance of Hervs in the genome and their potentially numerous functions, we wanted to better understand whether genetic susceptibility to certain psychiatric disorders was associated with differences in Herv expression.

In our study, we profiled Herv expression in nearly 800 autopsy brain samples. This helped us identify DNA variations that influenced Herv expression in the brain.

We then cross-referenced this information with findings from large genetic studies which had compared genetic differences between tens of thousands of people – both with and without mental health conditions. These studies identified variations in DNA associated with different psychiatric conditions.

We found that that the expression of four Hervs was linked with genetic susceptibility to major psychiatric disorders. The expression of two of these Hervs was associated with schizophrenia, one Herv with both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and one with depression.

These results suggest that Hervs may be playing a more important role in the brain than initially thought.

There are many genes involved in psychiatric disorders – and Hervs are only a part of this puzzle. Although the precise impact of these Hervs on brain cells and on a person's susceptibility to certain psychiatric disorders requires further research, our study is the first to show that genetic susceptibility for a psychiatric disorder also acts through these ancient viral DNA sequences.

It's still too early to determine the practical applications of our findings – and whether they might be used to develop new treatments. But we're optimistic about this line of research.

By linking Herv expression in the brain with psychiatric disorders, our research recognises the importance of these mysterious sequences in the human genome, which have been ignored for years.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

These results suggest that Hervs may be playing a more important role in the brain than initially thought
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

Best year yet for Indian filmmakers with three wins at Cannes 2024

Kani Kusruti, Chhaya Kadam, Payal Kapadia (winner of the grand prize for 'All We Imagine as Light'), and Divya Prabha pose during 77th international film festival, Cannes, southern France
PHOTO: PTI

It was a triple feat for Indian talent at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival with Payal Kapadia's 'All We Imagine As Light', 'Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know" by FTII student Chidananda S Naik, and Anasuya Sengupta of "The Shameless" fame winning major awards in each of the three competitive sections of the prestigious gala.

The 77th edition of Cannes, which concluded on Saturday, was undoubtedly the best year for the country which found space at the fest through eight Indian, or India-themed, films.

Kapadia, an alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), charted history by becoming the first Indian filmmaker to win the Grand Prix award for 'All We Imagine as Light'.

"Thank you, Cannes Film Festival for having our film here. Please don't wait 30 years to have another Indian film," she said in her speech.

The movie earned the honour, the second-most prestigious prize of the gala after the Palme d'Or, which went to American director Sean Baker for "Anora".

'All We Imagine as Light', a Malayalam-Hindi feature starring Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, revolves around three women in Mumbai who go on a road trip to a beach town.

Kapadia's movie, her feature directorial debut, is the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian female director to be showcased in main competition, last being Shaji N Karun's 'Swaham' (1994).

That 'All We Imagine As Light' will win an award became almost certain when it received glowing reviews following its premiere, with some international critics describing it as a "portrait of urban connection" and "poetic meditation" as well as comparing Kapadia's work to that of masters like Satyajit Ray and Wong Kar Wai.

Though the second most prestigious prize at Cannes, Grand Prix has a storied history with prominent titles including this year's Oscar winner 'The Zone of Interest' and Park Chan-wook's revenge drama 'Oldboy' as part of the list.

'All We Imagine as Light' has already found distributors for its North America release, but it's unclear when the film will be screened in India.

Writer-lyricist Varun Grover said it was an "unbelievable day" for Indian cinema.

"Dissent, in art and in life, is a tough path to choose. But sometimes it does create magic," he wrote on X.

Kapadia, who led a student protest against the appointment of actor-politician Gajendra Chauhan as FTII chairman, had won the Oeil d'or (Golden Eye) award at Cannes for acclaimed documentary 'A Night of Knowing Nothing' , which premiered under Director's Fortnight section in 2021.

Her 2017 short film 'Afternoon Clouds' opened at Cannes under Cinefondation category, dedicated to supporting the next generation of talented filmmakers.

Actor Richa Chadha called Kapadia's win historic.

"Wow!! What an incredible achievement for Indian cinema! Take a bow," said Malayalam star Tovino Thomas.

That's not all.

Production designer Sengupta, who starred in a key featuring role in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's 'The Shameless', became the first Indian to win the best actress prize in Un Certain Regard.

'The Shameless' explores a dark world of exploitation and misery in which two sex workers forge a bond.

Sengupta dedicated her win "to the queer community and other marginalised communities".

"You don't have to be queer to fight for equality, you don't have to be colonised to know that colonising is pathetic — we just need to be decent human beings," she said.

Actor Tillotama Shome shared Sengupta's speech on Instagram.

"She brought it HOME. Listen to her words. Till the end. The quality of her voice. Ink this in your hearts. For all the dreamers..."

British-Indian director Sandhya Suri's 'Santosh', also part of Un Certain Regard, didn't win any award but being featured at Cannes is an achievement in itself.

Neeraj Ghaywan's 'Masaan' previously won two awards—FIPRESCI, International Jury of Film Critics prize and Promising Future prize in the section. Naik's 'Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know...', which won the La Cinef first prize | film school fiction or animated films), was another feather in FTII's cap.

Based on a Kannada folktale, the movie follows an old woman who steals a rooster following which the sun stops rising in the village.

The third La Cinef prize went to India-born Mansi Maheshwari's animation film 'Bunnyhood'.

Previously, Indian films to be selected for the Cannes Competition segment include Mrinal Sen's 'Kharij' (1983), MS Sathyu's 'Garm Hava' (1974), Satyajit Ray's 'Parash Pathar' (1958), Raj Kapoor's 'Awaara' (1953), V Shantaram's 'Amar Bhoopali' (1952) and Chetan Anand's 'Neecha Nagar' (1946).

This year, India's presence at Cannes also saw the restored version of Shyam Benegal's 1976 crowdfunded film 'Manthan' in Cannes Classics. Karan Kandhari's 'Sister Midnight' appeared in Directors' Fortnight and Maisam Ali's 'In Retreat' was picked for ACID Cannes. 'Maya: The Birth of a Superhero', a virtual reality title with an India connect, was also selected. In 2013, Indian cinema sent five films to various sections – 'Monsoon Shootout' (Midnight Screening), 'Bombay Talkies' (a Special Screening to mark 100 years since Dada Saheb Phalke's 'Raja Harishchandra'), 'Ugly' (Directors' Fortnight), 'The Lunchbox' (Critics' Week) and 'Charulata' (Cannes Classics).

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

B'desh launches evacuation ahead of cyclone Remal

DHAKA, 26 MAY

Bangladesh on Sunday launched an intensified evacuation campaign in vulnerable areas as it prepares for severe cyclonic storm 'Remal' forecast to make landfall by evening or midnight with a potential high tidal surge and heavy rainfall in the country's coastal districts of Satkhira and Cox's Bazar. "A large-scale evacuation has already started. All vulnerable people are presumed to be moved to safer places at the shortest possible time," Director General of the Department of Disaster Management Mizanur Rahman said. "A total of 78,000 volunteers from the Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) have been kept ready to deal with cyclone 'Remal' in the coastal district," he said. Around 4,000 cyclone shelter centres have been readied in the coastal districts, equipped with adequate dry food supplies. *—PTI*

Pak firm warns of power cut in Sindh over unpaid dues

ISLAMABAD, 26 MAY

Electricity supplying company in Pakistan, K-Electric issued a stern warning to cut off power supply to the departments of the Sindh government over remaining dues amounting to billions of rupees, reported ARY News, citing sources. According to the sources close to the development, the Sindh government and the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) have not cleared any payments to K-Electric since January. The non-payment of dues has led to a financial crisis for K-Electric, causing significant difficulties in network maintenance. In response to these unpaid dues, KE issued letters to key officials, including the Sindh Secretary of Finance and the Mayor of Karachi, urging immediate payment of the outstanding electricity bills, ARY News said. *—ANI*

Chile firefighter arrested for starting fire that killed 137

SANTIAGO, 26 MAY

Over three months after the deadly fire in Chile, the authorities have arrested a firefighter and a forestry official on suspicion of starting a blaze that killed 137 people in the resort city of Vina del Mar in February, reported Al Jazeera. "An arrest warrant was issued today against the person who started the fires in February in the Valparaiso region," where Vina del Mar is located, police director Eduardo Cerna said in a news conference. A little later, the Valparaiso regional prosecutor's office confirmed the arrest of a second suspect, an official of the National Forestry Corporation (Conaf), the body responsible for fighting forest fires and managing national parks. Both men will be remanded in custody on charges of arson resulting in deaths. *—ANI*

Lithuanians return to polls in Prez election 2nd round

VILNIUS, 26 MAY

Lithuanians return to the polls Sunday for the second round of the Baltic country's presidential election as incumbent President Gitanas Nauseda seeks to hold off Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyte and secure another five-year term. The 60-year-old Nauseda, a moderate conservative, has been a strong backer of Ukraine, a position shared across most of the political spectrum. The popular Nauseda has been in office since 2009 and during that time Lithuania has also given refuge to many who have fled an authoritarian crackdown in neighbouring Belarus and increased repression in Russia. *—AP*

Rajapaksas to start political comeback bid in Sri Lanka

The next parliamentary election is not due before August 2025

COLOMBO, 26 MAY

Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa clan, which suffered political battering due to the country's worst economic crisis in 2022, will launch its political comeback bid on Sunday by targeting the impending elections.

Former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, ex-prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and former finance minister Basil Rajapaksa were ousted from power during anti-government protests following the crippling financial and political crisis in 2022.

The ruling Sri Lanka People's Front of the Rajapaksas, commonly known by its Sinhalese name Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), will hold a public rally later in the day in the north central rural town of Thalawa, party member and former minister SM Chandrasena told reporters.

He said that Mahinda Rajapaksa would inaugurate the rally, aiming to prepare the party grassroots for the major elections — the presidential or the parliamentary. "We will start our campaign to gear the party for whatever the election that comes first," Chandrasena said.

Former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, ex-prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa were ousted from power during anti-government protests PHOTO: PTI

According to the Election Act, the presidential election should occur before the parliamentary elections. The next parliamentary election is not due before August 2025. On Wednesday, President Ranil Wickremesinghe reiterated his intention to hold the presidential election this year ahead of the parliamentary election.

SLPP, however, wants the parliamentary election ahead of the scheduled 2025 date. Earlier this month, the Elections Commission said the presidential election would be conducted at a date between 17 September and 16 October.

SLPP is yet to announce its candidate, while the two major opposition camps have already announced their presidential candidates. SLPP went into hiding after the massive street protests began in early 2022, which caused the resignation of the then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

- SLPP, however, wants the parliamentary election ahead of the scheduled 2025 date. Earlier this month, Elections Commission said the presidential election would be conducted at a date between 17 September, 16 October

SLPP was forced to elect arch-rival Wickremesinghe to serve the balance term of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. One of SLPP Members of Parliament was killed by an angry mob. The properties of nearly 100 other party seniors were set on fire in the outpouring of public outrage over their inability to handle the economic crisis. *—PTI*

UN says 670 killed in Papua New Guinea landslide; rescue op on

MELBOURNE, 26 MAY

The International Organisation for Migration on Sunday increased its estimate of the death toll from a massive landslide in Papua New Guinea to more than 670.

Serhan Aktoprak, the Chief of the UN migration agency's mission in the South Pacific island nation, said the revised death toll was based on calculations by Yambali village and Enga provincial officials that more than 150 homes had been buried by Friday's landslide. The previous estimate had been 60 homes.

Local officials had initially put the death toll on Friday at 100 or more. Only five bodies and a leg of a sixth victim had been recovered by Sunday.

Emergency responders in Papua New Guinea were moving survivors to safer ground on Sunday as tons of unstable earth and tribal warfare, which is rife in the country's Highlands, threatened the rescue effort. The South Pacific island's government meanwhile is considering whether it needs to officially request more international support.

Only five bodies were recovered by Sunday PHOTO: X/@EURONEWSAR

Besides the blocked highway, convoys that have transported food, water and other essential supplies since Saturday to the devastated village have faced risks related to tribal fighting in Tambitanis village, about halfway along the route. Papua New Guinea soldiers were providing security for the convoys.

Eight locals were killed in a clash between two rival clans on Saturday in a longstanding dispute unrelated to the landslide. Around 30 homes and five retail businesses were burned down in the fighting, local officials said. *—AP*

Aid trucks enter Gaza under deal with Egypt

DEIR AL-BALAH, 26 MAY

Aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel on Sunday through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month.

But was unclear if humanitarian groups would be able to access the aid because of ongoing fighting in the area.

Egypt refuses to reopen its side of the Rafah crossing until control of the Gaza side is handed back to Palestinians.

It agreed to temporarily divert traffic through Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing, Gaza's main cargo terminal, after a call between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

But that crossing has been largely inaccessible because of fighting linked to Israel's offensive in the nearby city of Rafah. Israel says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter, but United Nations agencies say it is usually too dangerous to retrieve the aid on the other side.

Israel's assault on Gaza is now in its eighth month and has killed 35,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Around 80 per cent of the population's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, severe hunger is widespread and UN officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine. *—AP*

RENEWED FLASH FLOODS KILL AT LEAST 15 IN AFG

ISLAMABAD, 26 MAY

Renewed heavy rains have triggered more flash floods in Afghanistan, killing at least 15 people, including 10 members of the same family in the northeast, officials said Sunday. The unusually heavy seasonal rains have been wreaking havoc on multiple parts of the country, killing hundreds of people and destroying property and crops. The UN food agency warned that survivors were unable to make a living. The floods on Saturday hit northeastern Badakhshan and northern Baghlan, with the latter already having suffered the brunt of the rains earlier this month. *—AP*

Zelenskyy urges leaders to join Global Peace Summit

KYIV, 26 MAY

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday urged the global leaders to participate in the Global Peace Summit, which begins on 15 June, stressing that Russia is run by men who want to make it a norm of burning lives and dividing people. He emphasised that no nation can stop such war alone and unaided.

In a post on X, Zelenskyy said that together with Switzerland, Ukraine is preparing for such a Summit. "For them, it is a pleasure to burn. We all know who we are dealing with. Russia is run by men who want to make it a norm - burning lives, destroying cities and villages, dividing people, and erasing national borders through war. There is no nation that can stop such war alone, unaided. At least 80 countries condirmed their attendence," the Ukrainian President said.

He further said that Ukraine has the world's largest experience of lies from Russia in terms of dialogue and negotiations. *—ANI*

At least 80 countries confirmed their attendence PHOTO: PTI

MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Sunak promises to bring back National Service for UK youth

This was his first major election pledge announcement PHOTO: PTI

LONDON, 26 MAY

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday said he will introduce a mandatory National Service for youth if the Conservatives win another five-year term in the 4 July polls.

This was his first major election pledge announcement,

He said his plan would see 18-year-olds given the choice of a full-time military placement for 12 months or a scheme to volunteer for one weekend a month for a year. The military placement would be selective, with tests used to decide eligibility and involve working with the armed forces or in cyber defence.

ambition benefits our country and our young people alike," he said, pointing to Sweden where 80 per cent of young people completing National Service say they recommend it to their friends.

While he took aim at the Opposition for saying they lack such a "clear plan", the Keir Starmer-led Labour Party hit back against the proposal. "This is another desperate GBP 2.5 billion unfunded commitment from a Tory party which already crashed the economy, sending mortgages rocketing, and now they're spoiling for more. This is not a plan – it's a review which could cost billions and is only needed because the Tories hollowed out the Armed Forces to their smallest size since Napoleon," the Labour Party said in a statement.

"There's going to be no criminal sanctions, nobody's going to jail over this," UK Home Secretary James Cleverly told 'Sky News', adding that nobody will be compelled to do the military element but those who do will be paid and those who choose to volunteer will not be paid.

Historically, National Service was introduced in 1947 after World War II by the then Labour government which involved men between the ages of 17 and 21 required to serve in the armed forces for 18 months. This mandatory National Service scheme came to an end in 1960. *—AP*

PHOTO: X/@CONFLICTXTWEETS

Pakistan shows support for China's stance on Taiwan

ISLAMABAD, 26 MAY

In a recent post on social media Shehbaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, reiterated Islamabad's unwavering support for China's stance on Taiwan.

He reaffirmed the country's commitment to the 'One China' policy, considering Taiwan an integral part of the People's Republic of China. "As an iron-brother and a strategic partner of China, Pakistan has always extended its principled support to the Chinese position on Taiwan and will continue to do so. Pakistan adheres to 'One China' policy, regards Taiwan as an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China and supports the Chinese government's efforts for national reunification. The so-called elections or transition of the self-proclaimed government in Taiwan do not change the objective facts on the Taiwan issue," said Shehbaz.

Pakistan's vocal endorsement of China's position on Taiwan comes amidst growing global attention on the Taiwan Strait tensions and heightened diplomatic manoeuvers surrounding the island's status. With geopolitical complexities shaping regional dynamics, Pakistan's reaffirmation of solidarity with China underscores the significance of alignment within the broader context of international relations.

China warned the US that efforts toward "'Taiwan's independence" are a "dead end" and "will only backfire". *—ANI*

Sudan: 47 killed in el Fasher region as conflict rages

KHARTOUM, 26 MAY

At least 30 civilians and 17 soldiers were killed in attacks in the Sudanese city of el-Fasher, as fighting in the country shows no sign of abating since the conflict started in mid-April last year, reported Al Jazeera.

War in Sudan erupted in mid-April last year when a simmering feud between the leaders of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) exploded into violence, Al Jazeera reported.

Fighting between the army—headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan—and the paramilitary RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo since last April has killed tens of thousands of people.

Moreover, almost nine million people have been displaced since the war, leading to a looming famine and grave humanitarian crisis.

While the war started in the capital Khartoum, it spread to Darfur and unleashed ethnic violence, resurfacing old rivalries dating back to a brutal war in the early 2000s, as reported by Al Jazeera.

El-Fasher is the last domino yet to fall in Darfur as the RSF has taken control of nearly all the main cities of the western Sudanese state.

The RSF's steady gains on the ground prompted ex-Darfur rebel leaders Minnawi and Jibril Ibrahim to break months of neutrality and declare their intention to join the war on the SAF's side in November last year. *—ANI*

At least 30 civilians and 17 soldiers were killed PHOTO: X/@THEHAWK

THE 'PEAKY BLINDERS'

How Ukraine's drone squad defends Kharkiv

KHARKIV, 26 MAY

In the village of Lyptsi, Ukrainian forces appear to have blunted Russia's surprise offensive.

A few weeks ago, they were rapidly advancing towards Kharkiv. But with the help of reinforcements Ukraine is slowly stemming the tide.

Two of the team point shotguns out of the window. They scan the sky for kamikaze drones. They've become one of the most potent weapons of this war. This Ukrainian unit are about to use them too. They call themselves the Peaky Blinders, after the cult TV series. Oleksandr, their leader, says at the outbreak of the war they turned up to guard their streets with shotguns, wearing civilian clothing. He says it was like a scene from the hit show.

But they're no longer a ragtag team of volunteers. They're now battle-hardened and have been trained by Western special forces. They're now the high-tech Peaky Blinders, using cheap, mass-produced small drones. They've kept the name and wear flat caps in camouflage, with their motto embroidered on the back - "To Find and Destroy".

One of the soldiers said the high-tech 'Peaky Blinders' are using cheap, mass-produced small drones PHOTO: BBC/ LEE DURANT

Russian strike kills 12 in Kharkiv

At least 12 people have been killed and 43 others wounded after Russian forces hit a supermarket in the northern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv with two glide bombs, local officials say. A large fire could be seen raging at the Epicentr K home improvement store on the northern outskirts of the city. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said at least 200 people could have been inside the supermarket. *—BBC News*

Since the offensive began, the Peaky Blinders team say they have killed or injured more than 100 Russian soldiers. They operate like a small air force with dozens of drones and an arsenal of bombs – ones to take out tanks, others to target groups of infantry or individual soldiers. They either drop the bombs or use kamikaze drones which they fly directly into a target. They're also known as First Person View, or FPV drones. On the day we visit they're struggling to find new targets. It's evidence they're having some success. The Russians are hiding.

Drones have transformed this war to a point. But Anton, Oleksandr's older brother, knows they're not enough to defeat the Russians. "We can hold them back with drones and hurt them," he says, "but not, unfortunately, to win with them". *—BBC News*

FPIs take out ₹22,000 cr from equities in May

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Foreign investors have pulled out a massive Rs 22,000 crore from Indian equities so far this month, due to uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections and outperformance of Chinese markets. This came following a net outflow of over Rs 8,700 crore in the entire April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and a sustained rise in US bond yields. Before that, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 35,098 crore in March and Rs 1,539 crore in February. Going forward, as clarity emerges on the election front,FPIs are likely to buy in India, since they cannot afford to miss the post-election results rally. Actually, the rally may begin even before the election results, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WEBSITE

Expect sales to grow faster, says JLR India

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Tata Motors owned Jaguar Land Rover expects to grow faster than the luxury car segment this fiscal, as it bolsters localisation and expands product range, according to a top company executive. The company, which is set to commence local assembly of Range Rover and Range Rover Sport in India, witnessed a sales growth of 81 per cent in 2023-24 fiscal year at 4,436 units, as compared to FY23. The automaker aims to double its business in India over the next three years."The luxury car segment grew in the range of 20-25 per cent last fiscal. We expect that the growth rate will remain in this range for the next couple of years. And we anticipate to beat this growth rate," Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) Managing Director Rajan Amba told PTI. *—PTI*

Edible oil industry urges Centre not to extend ban on rice

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Edible oil industry body Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) has requested the central government not to extend the ban on the exports of de-oiled rice bran, which is presently under prohibition. The government initially banned the export of the commodity in July 2023 for four months and later extended it until March 2024, and then again by another four months till July.The move was intended apparently to address inflation in milk prices and fodder costs.De-oiled rice bran (DORB) is a by-product of the rice milling process that's made from the pressed cake of rice bran after oil is extracted from it. It is widely used as livestock feed. *—ANI*

IOC, GAIL, ONGC fined for failing to appoint directors

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

State-owned oil and gas giants including IndianOil, ONGC and GAIL (India) Ltd have been slapped with fines for the fourth straight quarter for failing to meet listing requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board. Stock exchanges imposed a cumulative fine of Rs 34 lakh on oil refining and fuel marketing giants Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiner Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) for not meeting the listing requirement in the January-March quarter, stock exchange filings showed. *—PTI*

Is Tata Group's Air India revamp working?

Dozens of crew showed objections to Airline's HR policies

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Over 100 crew members of the Air India's budget subsidiary called in sick at the last minute earlier this month, forcing the airline to delay or cancel at least 175 flights during the strike action.

Dozens of disgruntled cabin crew workers said they walked out to show their objection to changes in Air India Express' human resources policies after the carrier was taken over by the Tata Group in 2022, as part of efforts by India's government to privatise the debt-ridden airline.

The absence of senior cabin crew led to commotion across the carrier's network, resulting in chaos at several airports as hundreds of passengers were left stranded.

Facing head winds

A month earlier, reportedly upset at reduced guaranteed pay, pilots at Vistara, a premier carrier Tata co-owns with Singapore Airlines, also staged a mass sick leave.

The staffing crisis grounded more than 100 flights.

India has become the world's largest aircraft purchaser after the US and China *PHOTO: PTI*

When will passenger satisfaction improve?

Many had hoped that the sprawling Tata Group would swiftly revive the airline's former reputation as the "Maharaja of the Sky" (King of the Sky) after decades of government neglect.

But the multinational conglomerate is still struggling to restore the high-flying days of India's national carrier.

Tata is currently consolidating four airlines: Air India Express and AIX Connect, which currently operates as AirAsia India, are being merged, as well as Vistara and Air India.

Civil aviation experts and travel companies believe that it will take considerable time to completely overhaul India's newly privatized 92-year-old flag carrier.

Umesh Kamath, managing director of Dravidan Aviation Services, pointed out that the assets of Air India, the routes, and a well-established network were its advantages — but said that the carrier suffered from human resources issues, as well as a lethargic workforce.

Yet, India's aviation sector is poised for impressive and healthy growth in terms of passengers, aircraft and airports.

The Indian government has earmarked around $11 billion (10.2 billion) to build new airports and refurbish existing ones.

Additionally, India has become the world's largest aircraft purchaser after the US and China, with its fleet size set to grow from 713 to upwards of 2,000 over the next decade.

In 2023, India's airlines placed orders for 970 aircraft.

In February 2023, Air India alone ordered 470 aircraft, including from Airbus and Boeing.

Betting on turnaround

Air India CEO Campbell Wilson said the group was undertaking a massive project and the journey to restoring Air India to its former glory was well under way. *—PTI*

IN 2023-24

India in trade deficit with 9 of top 10 trading partners

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

- China has emerged as India's largest trading partner with USD 118.4 billion of two-way commerce in 2023-24, edging past the US

India has recorded a trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, with nine of its top 10 trading partners, including China, Russia, Singapore, and Korea, in 2023-24, according to official data.

The data also showed that the deficit with China, Russia, Korea, and Hong Kong increased in the last fiscal compared to 2022-23, while the trade gap with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Indonesia, and Iraq narrowed.

The trade deficit with China rose to USD 85 billion, Russia to USD 57.2 billion, Korea to USD 14.71 billion and Hong Kong to USD 12.2 billion in 2023-24 against USD 83.2 billion, USD 43 billion, USD 14.57 billion and USD 8.38 billion, respectively, in 2022-23.

China has emerged as India's largest trading partner with USD 118.4 billion of two-way commerce in 2023-24, edging past the US.

The bilateral trade between India and the US stood at USD 118.28 billion in 2023-24. Washington was the top trading partner of New Delhi during 2021-22 and 2022-23.

India has a free trade agreement with four of its top trading partners - Singapore, the UAE, Korea and Indonesia (as part of the Asian bloc).

India has a trade surplus of USD 36.74 billion with the US in 2023-24. America is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus. The surplus is also there with the UK, Belgium, Italy, France and Bangladesh.

India's total trade deficit in the last fiscal narrowed to USD 238.3 billion as against USD 264.9 billion in the previous fiscal. *—PTI*

BharatPe, PhonePe amicably settle dispute

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Fintech unicorns BharatPe Group and PhonePe Group have amicably settled all long-standing legal disputes pertaining to the use of the trademark with the suffix 'Pe', both companies said in a joint statement.

BharatPe and PhonePe had been involved in long-drawn legal disputes across multiple courts, over the course of the last five years. The settlement will put an end to all open judicial proceedings, the statement said.

"BharatPe and PhonePe amicably settled all long-standing trademark disputes," the statement said.

As a next step, parties have already taken steps to withdraw all opposition against each other in the trademark registry, which will help them to proceed with the registration of their respective trademarks, the statement said.

"This is a positive development for the industry. I appreciate the maturity and professionalism shown by the Management of both sides, working closely to resolve all outstanding legal issues and moving ahead to focus their energy and resources in building robust digital payment ecosystems," BharatPe, Chairman of the Board, Rajnish Kumar said. *—PTI*

Reliance-Nel pact to boost energy outlay

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Reliance Industries Ltd's technology partnership with Norway's Nel ASA will help accelerate its new energy investments, including in the production of green hydrogen that will aid billionaire Mukesh Ambani's pivot towards green energy.

Reliance (RIL) on 21 May entered into a technology licensing agreement that provides the company with an exclusive license for Nel's alkaline electrolysers in India and also allows it to manufacture the Norwegian company's alkaline electrolysers for captive purposes globally.

"We see this as a win-win for RIL and Nel as it supports RIL's ambition to accelerate its new energy ambitions, build an integrated energy vertical (new energy powering existing energy investments) and decarbonise the portfolio," brokerage Morgan Stanley said in a note.

Reliance Industries Ltd's technology will partner with Norway's Nel ASA to help accelerate its new energy investments *PHOTO: PTI*

For Nel, it provides a revenue stream that it could not access on a standalone basis in India and may provide a new revenue stream that will not solely depend on the company's ability to execute on securing new large electrolyser orders. Nel ASA has about 10-15 per cent global market share in electrolysers with 350MW and 400MW deliveries in 2023-2024.

According to the agreement, Nel can procure equipment from Reliance for its own projects. Nel will continue to serve the Indian market with technology platforms that are not covered by the agreement. *—PTI*

MP: GAIL'S 10 MW GREEN HYDROGEN PLANT INAUGURATED

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

State-owned GAIL (India) Ltd's maiden green hydrogen plant at Vijaipur in Madhya Pradesh has been commissioned, making a major step for the nation's largest natural gas transmission and distribution firm's foray into new and alternate energy, the company said.

The 10-megawatt proton exchange membrane electrolyser for the green-hydrogen producing unit at the Vijaipur complex has been imported from Canada.

The plant will produce about 4.3 tonnes of green hydrogen per day, with a purity of about 99.999 per cent by volume. It uses electricity to split water to produce green hydrogen. *—PTI*

LUXURY FLATS IN FOCUS

New supply of homes dips 38% in B'luru & 7 cities

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

New supply of affordable homes -- priced up to Rs 60 lakh each, declined 38 per cent across eight major cities to 33,420 units during January-March this year, with builders focusing on developing luxury flats, according to PropEquity.

Real estate data analytic firm PropEquity attributed the fall in new supply to sharp rise in land and construction costs, which has made development of affordable housing projects less profitable or unviable.

According to PropEquity data, the fresh supply of homes, up to Rs 60 lakh each, stood at 33,420 units during January-March 2024 across top eight cities, as against 53,818 units in the year-ago period.

These eight cities are -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Pune and Ahmedabad.

New supply of homes priced up to Rs 60 lakh declined in MMR to 15,202 units.In Pune, the supply plunged to 6,836 units *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

PropEquity data showed that the new supply in this price category fell 20 per cent during the 2023 calendar year and the declining trend continued in the first quarter of this year as well. According to PropEquity data, the new supply of homes priced up to Rs 60 lakh declined in MMR to 15,202 units during January-March, from 22,642 units in the year-ago period.

New supply in Bengaluru decreased to 657 units from 3,701 units. In Kolkata, the new supply declined to 2,204 units, from 2,747 units. In Pune, the supply plunged to 6,836 units, from 12,538 units. *—PTI*

AGROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY POISED TO GROW 9% CAGR

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

India's agrochemical industry, which is at present estimated to be around USD 10 billion, is likely to reach upwards of USD 14.5 billion by the end of financial year 2027-28, as per a report by Rubix Data Sciences, an analytics services provider.

In the just concluded financial year 2023-24, it though saw a degrowth of 3 per cent, the report said. Several key factors contributed to this setback.

The influx of competitively priced products from China further exacerbated the situation last fiscal year.

Firstly, the export market, which traditionally commands over 50 per cent of the industry's revenue, faced sluggish growth. This can be attributed to a global destocking trend, where international players likely opted to reduce their inventory levels, the report noted. *—ANI*

India's Q4 FY24 GDP likely to have grown at 6.1-6.7%

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

India's GDP in the fourth quarter of financial year 2023-24 is expected to have grown within the range of 6.1-6.7 per cent, lower than over 8 per cent rate recorded in the previous three quarters, according to projections by various economists.

The GDP numbers for the fourth quarter (January-March 2024) and the provisional estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal year are scheduled to be released by the government on 31 May.

According to economists, the expected growth in 2023-24 fiscal is estimated to be in the range of 7.6-7.8 per cent. The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the June quarter, 8.1 per cent in the September quarter and 8.4 per cent in the December quarter of 2023-24.

Kotak Mahindra Bank Chief Economist Upasna Bhardwaj said high frequency data suggests robust growth across the board. Also, trade and hotels have held up in the fourth quarter. "Manufacturing activities have also been good, and construction linked and investment segments should be doing better, but agriculture sector growth could be a laggard and see contraction during the quarter. We are expecting 6.1 per cent GDP growth for the fourth quarter and as a result, the full-year number for GDP growth should be close to 7.6 per cent," Bhardwaj said. India's GDP expanded 6.1 per cent in the March quarter of 2022-23 fiscal, as per 31 May, 2023 estimates. The growth for full fiscal 2022-23 was 7 per cent. *—ANI*

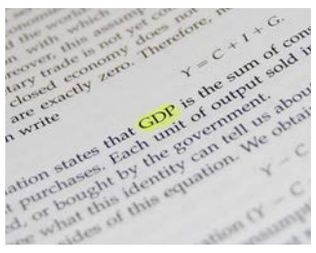
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PHOTO: PIXABAY

MARKETS MAY UP-MOVE AHEAD OF LOK SABHA POLL RESULTS

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Equity markets may witness a gradual up-move this week with some volatility as both election and earnings season are nearing their end, analysts said, adding that global trends and trading activity of foreign investors would hold significance in dictating investors' sentiment.

Benchmark indices, which had a record-breaking rally last week, would also track global oil benchmark Brent crude and the rupee-dollar trend.

The monthly derivatives expiry on Thursday may also fuel volatility in markets.

"We have reached the final curtain for the Q4 earnings season. Many companies, including names like Tata Steel, will release their financial results this week.

Positive earnings from the final quarter could provide strength to the market to continue its bullish momentum.

"We are very close to the Lok Sabha election results, and the election verdict will give a boost to FII flows," said Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on 4 June.

On the global front, the upcoming economic data from Japan and the US, along with movement in the global currency market, will also be important factors to consider, he added.

This week, attention will remain on elections, global cues, and the final phase of the earnings season, Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

On the March quarter results front, LIC, NMDC, IRCTC, and MMTC will announce their earnings this week. *—PTI*

IN ASSAM

Tea growers upset as factories stop produce

GUWAHATI, 26 MAY

Assam, who account for nearly half of the tea grown in this North Eastern state, are staring at uncertainty with the bought leaf tea factories (BLFs) to stop procuring their green leaves from next month over quality compliance regulations.

The Assam Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers Association (ABLTMA) had announced shutting down its factories from June one as it is not possible to produce FSSAI-compliant teas from untested green leaves provided by small growers.

A Team Board India notification earlier this year made it mandatory for manufacture of only compliant tea by the BLFs.

With no testing done of the green leaves, if the made tea is found non-compliant when sent for mandatory public auction, the failed teas will be destroyed with penal action against the BLFs, as per the notification.

A Team Board India notification earlier this year made it mandatory for manufacture of only compliant tea by the BLFs *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The small-scale planters, on their part, maintained that they are working on cent per cent compliance by all their members, while urging for more time to ensure it and seeking government intervention in the matter.

Referring to the notification which also made routing of 100 per cent dust teas through public auctions mandatory, he said it was decided last month to maintain status quo till elections are over.

The AASTGA has dashed off separate letters to the state government and Tea Board, seeking their intervention while also expressing concern that this unilateral decision of the ABLTMA was a ploy to lead to drop in prices of green leaves. Expressing similar concern, Jatin Chandra Bora, advisor of Lakhimpur district committee of AASTGA, said, "This is a strategy to bring down the prices of the green leaves as such a decision creates pressure on the grower to sell off at whatever price is given."

He maintained that the small growers are now aware of harmful effects of pesticides and are ensuring on producing safety standards-compliant leaves. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X / @NAOMIOSAKA

Osaka sets up possible Iga clash at Roland Garros

PARIS, 26 MAY

Naomi Osaka reached the French Open second round for the first time in three years with a battling victory over Italy's Lucia Bronzetti on Sunday, setting up a likely meeting with World No. 1 Iga Swiatek. Osaka, who took a 16-month hiatus from tennis in September 2022, was inconsistent in the first match on Court Philippe Chatrier of the tournament but secured a 6-1, 4-6, 7-5 win.She will next face her fellow four-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek if the Pole sees off Leolia Jeanjean on Monday. The pair have only played each other twice before, with their last meeting a Swiatek victory in the 2022.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Deepika falls to Lim again, and returns empty-handed

YECHEON, 26 MAY

Deepika Kumari fell short of a successive Archery World Cup medal in her international comeback after becoming a mother, losing to world No 2 Lim Sihyeon and No 3 Alejandra Valencia here on Sunday. Indian archers thus returned empty-handed in the Olympic discipline recurve category, while securing two medals (one gold and one silver) in the compound section of the World Cup Stage 2. India had won the women's team gold and mixed team silver in the compound event on Saturday, but none of the recurve archers other than Deepika were able to make the medal rounds.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Javelin ace Neeraj to miss Ostrava Golden Spike

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Olympic gold-medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will miss the Ostrava Golden Spike 2024 athletics meet in the Czech Republic on 28 May due to a muscle injury he sustained in training two weeks ago, the organizers said. Chopra has competed in two competitions this season -- the Doha Diamond League and the Federation Cup. The 26-year-old will, however, attend the prestigious meet as a guest. "Due to an injury that he sustained in training two weeks ago (adductor muscle) he will not be able to throw in Ostrava, but he will arrive at the event as a guest," said the organizers of the competition in a statement.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Grayson dies after withdrawing from Colonial

NEW YORK, 26 MAY

Two-time PGA Tour winner Grayson Murray died Saturday morning at age 30, one day after he withdrew from the Charles Schwab Cup Challenge at Colonial. There were no immediate details on the circumstances of his death, only shock and grief from the PGA Tour and his management team. "I am at a loss for words," PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said. "The PGA Tour is a family, and when you lose a member of your family, you are never the same.—*PTI*

Dipa Karmakar wins gold at Asian C'ship

Scripts history as the only Indian gymnast to bag gold

TASHKENT, 26 MAY

Ace Indian gymnast Dipa Karmakar became the first Indian to win a gold medal when she won the vault event at the Asian Gymnastics Championships, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on Sunday.

Previously, India had won only four bronze medals across different editions of the competition. Karmakar was the first Indian woman to win a medal at the event after she won bronze at the 2015 edition in Hiroshima, Japan.

On Sunday though, Karmakar scored a total of 13.566 in the vault discipline – her per event – to pip North Korea's Kim Son Hyang, who scored 13.466 points to finish in second position.

The win however, comes days after Karmakar failed to secure a berth for the 2024 Olympics Games after she finished 16th in the all-around event of the competition that was held on Friday, meaning that there will be no Indian participation in the gymnastics event in Paris.

Karmakar, 30, has endured a challenging past few years in her career as she has had to deal with injuries and a doping charge.

She returned to the sport after her suspension period ended and had topped the trials for the Asian Games, but was surprisingly not allowed to go for the multi-sports event in Hangzhou.

Karmakar had finished fourth in the vault event when she competed in the vault event at the Rio Olympics in 2016.

—*PTI*

Previously India had won only four bronze medals

PHOTO: X / @DIPAKARMAKAR

MotoGP: Bagnaia wins Catalunya Grand Prix

DUBAI, 26 MAY

Two-time defending world champion Francesco Bagnaia snatched victory at the Catalunya MotoGP on Sunday to edge closer to championship leader Jorge Martin.

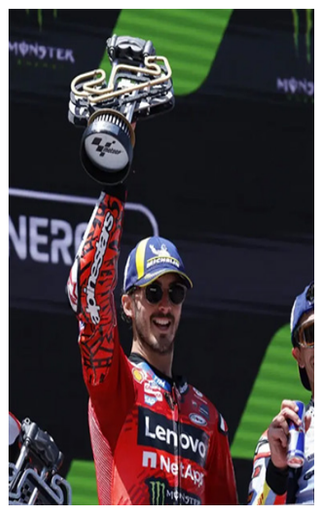
Bagnaia on his factory Ducati reeled in race leader Martin before the Italian passed him on lap 20 at turn five where he crashed out of the sprint on Saturday, to claim his third victory of the season.

Martin could not respond and Bagnaia triumphed by nearly two seconds to cut the gap on the Spaniard to 39 points in the standings.

Home favorite Marc Marquez came in third ahead of Aleix Espargaro, who announced he was retiring at the end of the season earlier this week. Marquez is third in the standings, 41 points behind compatriot Martin.

"Honestly I was very angry about yesterday (his crash in the sprint whilst leading on the last lap) but I knew the potential I had and was able to win the race," said Bagnaia.

"(It was a) tough start but then I saw some struggling at the front and I pushed more. The bike was amazing, the team did an amazing job setting up the bike and now I'm looking forward to the next race (next weekend's Italian MotoGP)," he said.



world champion Francesco Bagnaia

PHOTO: X / @PECCO63

Seventh at lights out on his Pramac Ducati, Martin got through on Pedro Acosta for second and then Bagnaia on turn 10 to take the lead with 20 laps to go.

Youngster Acosta was in hot pursuit on the day after his 20th birthday but skidded off the track in lap 11, rejoining in 20th place. After Bagnaia passed Martin towards the end he kept the overall leader at arm's length to clinch victory. —*AP*

Jamwal and Dev PHOTO: PTI

Boxers Jamwal and Dev advance in Olympic qualifiers

BANGKOK, 26 MAY

Indian boxers continued their dominant run on day three of the second World Boxing Qualifiers for the Paris Olympics as Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) comfortably won their bouts here on Sunday.

Jamwal, who replaced Olympian Shiva Thapa in the second qualifiers, was at his best against Andriejus Lavrenovas of Lithuania in his first-round bout.The Himachal Pradesh boxer was clinical with his punches in the opening round and dominated the ring further as his confidence rose higher to earn a unanimous 5-0 verdict from the judges. Later in the day, world championship bronze medallist Dev also secured a dominant 5-0 win over Armando Bighafa of Guinea-Bissau. Dev never looked under any kind of pressure as he controlled the bout from the very first minute. —*PTI*

Sha'Carri Richardson PHOTO: PTI

Sha'Carri Richardson continues her rise with a win

EUGENE (USA), 26 MAY

Sha'Carri Richardson continued her march toward the Paris Olympics on Saturday at the Prefontaine Classic, winning the women's 100 meters in 10.83 seconds. Kenyan Beatrice Chebet set a world record in the 10,000 meters at the Pre earlier in the day with a time of 28 minutes, 54.14 seconds, while American Christian Coleman won the day's other notable event, the men's 100, in a season-best 9.95. But the spotlight was on the battle between Richardson, the 2023 world champion, and Jamaican Elaine Thompson-Herah, the reigning Olympic gold medalist in both the 100 and 200 meters. Thompson-Herah faded at the Pre, finishing last in the field of nine. The charismatic Richardson, wearing her long hair tied back in a ponytail, muscled her way to the finish and dramatically pushed off the tape remnants. After crouching for a moment while her time was announced, Richardson rose to give the crowd at Hayward Field a smile and a wave. Julien Alfred of Saint Lucia finished second in 10.93. "I feel like I'm continuing to grow and develop into a mature young lady, a mature athlete, as well as a vessel that I am put on earth to continue to grow," Richardson said. Richardson will get her shot at a spot on the U.S. team for Paris at the Olympic trials next month in Eugene. She was denied a chance to run in the Tokyo Games because of a positive drug test for marijuana following her first-place finish in the 100 at the trials. —*PTI*

Indian women's hockey team loses 0-3 to Argentina

ANTWERP, 26 MAY

The Indian women's hockey team continued its winless streak in the Belgium leg of the FIH Pro League, slumping to a 0-3 defeat against Argentina here on Sunday.

Celina Di Santo (1st minute), Maria Campoy (39th), and Maria Granatto (47th) scored for Argentina in India's final match of the Belgium leg.

Argentina stormed ahead in the very first minute, dissecting the Indian high press and penetrating to the shooting circle, where Di Santo deflected in Granatto's shot to score their first goal.

As India struggled to play out of their half, a period of Argentinian dominance followed, resulting in a penalty corner eight minutes into the game, but they failed to extend their lead. India began stringing a few passes together and got into the game. They forced Argentine goalkeeper Clara Barberi into action after a low drive into the circle from Udita found Lalremsiami, who failed to score from close range. —*PTI*

Malaysia Masters: Sindhu signs off with runner-up finish

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Star Indian shuttler PV Sindhu's wait for a much-needed title extended further as she faltered in the finishing line, going down in three games to world no. 7 Wang Zhi Yi of China in the summit clash here on Sunday.

Fifth seed Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, last won the Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games in 2022 and finished runner-up at the Madrid Spain Masters in 2023.

The title here looked within her reach when world no. 15 Sindhu held a massive 11-3 lead in the decider after winning the opening game but the former world champion imploded after the final change of sides to go down 21-16 5-21 16-21 in a 79-minute women's singles final.

The title would have been an icing on the cake but her impressive run to the final will still give her a lot of confidence as Sindhu looks to put the finishing touches ahead of the Paris Olympics. It was her first final on the BWF world tour after more than a year.

Sindhu lost the final of the 2024 Malaysia Masters Super 500 to world no. 7 Wang Zhi Yi of China

PHOTO: X / @PVSINDHU1

Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, used a combination of poise and power to dominate the proceedings against the reigning Asian champion Wang for most of the match but everything fell apart after the break in the decider as the USD 420,000 crown slipped out of her hands.

` A silver and bronze medallist in the last two editions of the Olympics, Sindhu had lost to Wang at the Arctic Open last year but has defeated the Chinese twice in three meetings.

Interestingly, it was Wang against whom Sindhu had won the finals during her last BWF title at the Singapore Open.

On Sunday, Sindhu was leading 11-3 at the interval in the third game but she fell into a pool of errors after the change of sides as Wang won 18 of the next 23 points to seal the trophy in her name.

—*PTI*

Barcelona's team captain Alexia Putellas lifts the trophy after winning the women's Champions League final soccer match between FC Barcelona and Olympique Lyonnais at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao, Spain PHOTO: PTI

Srihari wins silver in Mare Nostrum swimming

NEW DELHI, 26 MAY

Ace India swimmer Srihari Nataraj clinched a silver medal in the 50m backstroke event at the 30th Mare Nostrum swimming tour at the Canet-en-Roussillon, France.

Nataraj, who competed a the Tokyo Olympics, clocked 25.50s to claim the second spot on the podium behind Hungary's Adam Jaszo, who touched the pad at 25.46s while Scott Gibson of Great Britain finished third with a timing of 25.64s on Saturday.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: X / @SRIHARI3529

FRENCH CUP

PSG beats Lyon 2-1 to win in Mbappe's last game

LONDON, 26 MAY

Paris Saint-Germain beat Lyon 2-1 in the French Cup final and completed the domestic double in Kylian Mbappe's last game for the club on Saturday.

France winger Ousmane Dembele and Spain midfielder Fabian Ruiz scored for PSG in the first half.

Lyon defender Jake O'Brien got a consolation goal in the second half.

PSG won the league and cup for the first time since 2020 when it achieved a domestic treble by also lifting the now-defunct League Cup.

Mbappé celebrated with a big roar after the final whistle. With an equally big smile on his face, he hugged and high-fived his teammates. The ecstatic PSG staff lifted Mbappé and threw him in the air.

"You feel a bit more the weight of things because you realize that it's over," Mbappé told broadcaster beIN Sports. "When I said goodbye to the Parc des Princes, there were still some games left, so you are still focused on what awaits you. Now, I have nothing left with PSG. But I'm very happy to have been able to finish with a trophy."

Despite losing in the final, Lyon still qualified for the Europa League by finishing sixth in the league.

Dembélé opened the scoring in the 22nd minute by heading home a cross from Nuno Mendes.

Ruiz doubled the lead by converting a rebound in the 34th after his header was blocked by O'Brien.

—*PTI*

PSG's Kylian Mbappe raises the trophy during the presentation ceremony after the French Cup final soccer match between Lyon and PSG at the Pierre Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve d'Ascq, northern France PHOTO: PTI

Inter Miami downs slumping Vancouver Whitecaps 2-1

VANCOUVER, 26 MAY

Robert Taylor scored a first-half goal and picked up an assist on Leo Campana's netter in the second half and Inter Miami defeated the Vancouver Whitecaps 2-1 on Saturday night, despite missing superstar Lionel Messi along with high-scoring Luis Suárez and midfielder Sergio Busquets.

Taylor scored for the third time this season when he used an assist from Jordi Alba to find the net in the 38th minute, giving Inter Miami (10-2-4) a 1-0 lead at halftime.

Taylor notched his assist in the 54th minute when Campana scored his fourth goal of the season for a two-goal advantage.

The Whitecaps (5-5-4) avoided the shutout when Ryan Gauld scored unassisted in the 72nd minute. It was Gauld's fifth goal.

Drake Callender saved one shot and wasn't tested in the scoreless first half for Inter Miami.

PHOTO: X / @INTERMIAMICF

Yohei Takaoka finished with four saves for Vancouver, all in the first half.

Vancouver fans voiced their displeasure on social media after Inter Miami announced earlier in the week that the trio would not be making the trip out West. Miami coach Gerardo (Tata) Martino told reporters Friday that the club opted to keep the 36-year-old Messi — as well as Suarez, 37, and Busquets, 35, in Florida because of upcoming home matches on Wednesday and Saturday next week.

It was a tough turn of events for the Whitecaps, who were expecting a record crowd of more than 50,000.

"Unfortunately, we have no control over who plays for our opponent, and it was important for us to communicate to our fans as soon as possible.

—*AP*